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THE MIND OF A POET

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THE MIND OF A POET

Volume One

A STUDY OF WORDSWORTH'S THOUGHT

BY

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Of genius, power,
Creation and divinity itself
I have been speaking, for my theme has been
What passed within me. Not of outward things
Done visibly for other minds, words, signs,
Symbols or actions, but of my own heart
Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind.
O Heavens! how awful is the might of souls,
And what they do within themselves while yet
The yoke of earth is new to them, the world
Nothing but a wild field where they were sown.
This is, in truth, heroic argument,
This genuine prowess, which I wished to touch
With hand however weak, but in the main
It lies far hidden from the reach of words.

Prelude, iii. 173-87

TO
SAM AND JEAN
MARY AND RUTH
IN LOVE AND ADMIRATION
WHICH HAVE DEEPENED THROUGH THE YEARS

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TABLE OF SIGLA, ABBREVIATIONS, ETC.

All references which do not include a title are to the 1850 text of
The Prelude

A B C D E J J J M U V W X Y Z and The Alfoxden Notebook = the various MSS of *The Prelude*, or parts of *The Prelude*, as described on pp. xvi-xxv and [608 A-E] of De Selincourt's edition of *The Prelude*

A² or B² = a first correction of A or B (and so with other letters)

A³ etc. = a second correction of A etc.

de S. = *The Prelude*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 1 vol., Oxford, 1926

Oxf. W. = *The Poetical Works of W. W.*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, 1 vol., Oxford, 1914

Knight = *The Poetical Works of W. W.*, ed. William Knight, 8 vols., 1896

Nowell Smith = *The Poems of W. W.*, ed. Nowell Charles Smith, 3 vols., 1908

P. W., Youth = *The Poetical Works of W. W.: Poems written in Youth, Poems referring to the period of Childhood*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 1 vol., Oxford, 1940

Grosart = *The Prose Works of W. W.*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 3 vols., 1876

Memoirs = *Memoirs of W. W.*, by Christopher Wordsworth, 2 vols., 1851

Legouis trs. = *The Early Life of W. W.*, by Émile Legouis, translated by J. W. Matthews, 2 ed., 1921

Harper = *W. W., his Life, Works and Influence*, by George McLean Harper, New York, 2 vols., 1916

Garrod = *Wordsworth: Lectures and Essays*, by H. W. Garrod, Oxford, 1923

N E D = *A New English Dictionary*, ed. James A. H. Murray and others, 10 vols., Oxford, 1884-1928

PREFACE

THE dim beginnings of this book lie forty years back in the courses which Professor Joseph H. Gilmore devoted to Wordsworth and particularly to *The Prelude* at the University of Rochester. In the first two decades after my leaving college I made something of a study of Wordsworth's poetry, which I frequently taught; and on the publication of Professor de Selincourt's edition of *The Prelude* in 1926 I chose that work as the subject of a seminar at the Johns Hopkins University. Since then several of my seminars have been devoted to Wordsworth and he has absorbed most of my summers and other free time, including two half-years spent in England. The greater part of my manuscript has been completely rewritten at least once and revised several times.

Any study of Wordsworth's mind must lean heavily on Professor de Selincourt's notable edition of *The Prelude*,¹ the sole source of our knowledge of the early manuscripts of that poem, devoted to the "growth of a poet's mind," and of other matters indispensable to the understanding of the subject. Familiarity with this work is assumed; nothing, for example, is repeated in my notes which is already found in his. I have not been able to study the manuscripts themselves since this was not Mr. Gordon Wordsworth's wish. As it is likely that most libraries and many Wordsworth scholars purchased the first edition of Professor de Selincourt's work I have made that edition my basis and have included in my notes all the more important additions and corrections which he has made subsequently.

I have not, however, followed him in taking the 1804-5 text as the norm and in quoting from it and referring to it wherever possible. By "*The Prelude*" is generally understood *The Prelude* of 1850. It has always been so; presumably it always will be so. This is the only version that is generally accessible and

¹ Oxford, 1926. This is not to be confused with the reprint of the 1805 text together with a selection from the introduction and notes to the earlier edition which Professor de Selincourt brought out in the Oxford Standard Authors series in 1933.

widely known; it is the only one the poet himself sanctioned for publication; and there is a fair probability that even in 1805 he would have found it more satisfactory than the version he completed in that year but had no intention of publishing without revision. Finally, in retaining the 1850 text as the standard we are following the principle advocated by the poet himself. In a letter to the well-known editor, Alexander Dyce, of April 30, 1830, he wrote: "You know what importance I attach to following strictly the last Copy of the text of an Author."

It is commonly assumed that in its account of facts and in its picture of the poet's early mind the unrevised A text is more accurate than the one published in 1850. In some cases this is undoubtedly true; in others it certainly is not. Everyone has had the experience of discovering, when he rereads what he has written some time earlier, that he has given an impression he did not intend to convey or one that might easily be misunderstood, or that he has omitted essential considerations. Wordsworth himself wrote to R. P. Gillies on December 22, 1814: "My first expressions I often find detestable; and it is frequently true of second words as of second thoughts, that they are the best." Furthermore, the pietistic and conservative additions and changes of later years are easily discounted whereas, despite its freshness, the frequent diffuseness, obscurity, awkwardness, and prosiness of the early text constantly interfere with the reader's enjoyment. Years of detailed comparison of the different versions have convinced me that, as poetry, the final text is, on the whole, much the best, and that the novelty of the 1805-6 version together with its very great interest and significance have misled those who hold it superior esthetically. But even if the early version were superior there can be no question as to the advantage of continuing, so far as is possible, to quote and refer to the only text known to earlier critics and biographers and the only one generally available today. This has been my practice, but whenever significant differences exist in the 1804-5 version this is also quoted and A is inserted between the number of the book and of the lines.² Since Professor

² The A never carries past a comma or semicolon; thus in xii. A 26, 357 and xii. A 26; xiii. 90, "357" and "xiii. 90" refer to the final text. Yet xii. A 26-32 means lines 26 to 32 of the A text. As the readings of manuscripts D, V, W, and the like are available only in Professor de Selincourt's edition, where they

de Selincourt takes the 1804-5 version as his basic text confusion is bound to arise, particularly in dealing with books xi-xiv, which in the earlier text are x-xiii. I have sought to lessen this confusion by always giving the number of the book as it is in the final text.* Thus the line designated xiii. 126 by Professor de Selincourt I refer to as xiv. A 126. The first part of a line is referred to as a, the second part as b. All references which do not include a title, such as viii. 46, are to *The Prelude*. The letters of Wordsworth and his sister are quoted from Professor de Selincourt's edition (6 volumes, Oxford, 1935-9) unless they are addressed to H. C. Robinson, in which case they are taken from *The Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle*, edited by Edith J. Morley (2 volumes, Oxford, 1927), or to Henry Reed, in which case they are taken from *Wordsworth & Reed, the Poet's Correspondence with his American Editor*, edited by Leslie N. Broughton (Ithaca, New York, 1933). Crabb Robinson's Diary is cited from *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers*, edited by Edith J. Morley (3 volumes, London, 1938).

I have not appended a list of books and articles consulted because such a list would have to be long and miscellaneous—including a pretty complete bibliography of Wordsworth together with general works, books on mysticism, Bartholomew Fair and other special topics—and would therefore take up much space and be of little use. Most of the books and articles that I have found valuable are mentioned in the footnotes. I hope, however, that readers will ignore the footnotes until they desire or need to consult them. When no place of publication is mentioned in connection with a title, London is to be understood.

My indebtedness to previous Wordsworth scholars is greater than I can express and undoubtedly greater than I am aware of—for who can say how much he owes to books he has known for a decade or more? I have quoted from them freely and have included in my notes what seem to be the best of their

have the numbering of the A text, such readings (which are likewise quoted or referred to whenever they differ significantly from the 1804-5 and the 1850 texts) are designated as "W variant of A 162" or "M variant of iii. A 207," etc.

* It is on this account that the A is placed after the number of the book but before the number of the lines.

comments on particular passages. To Professor de Selincourt I owe most of all, as every student of Wordsworth must, because of the wealth and importance of the material he has made available. The difficulty and complexity of his task in editing the fifteen manuscripts of *The Prelude* and the sanity and brilliance with which he has performed it can be appreciated only by one who has devoted months to the work and who has fallen into some of the many pitfalls with which its problems abound,—who has verified, for example, every detail of the remarkable reconstruction of the chronology of the composition of the poem (pp. xxxi-xl) and has studied the very able discussion of the date of the poet's Godwinian period (pp. 584-7). Moreover Professor de Selincourt brings to his task an unrivalled familiarity with the entire body of Wordsworth's and his sister's writings, with the countryside about which they wrote, and with the details of their lives.

I owe a more personal debt to my friend Mary Goodwillie, who has added to many other kindnesses the careful reading of a considerable part of my manuscript; to the most stimulating of colleagues, Arthur O. Lovejoy, for a number of suggestions; to my friend and former secretary, from whom I learned much, the late Addie F. Rowe, for generous assistance; to the late Gordon Wordsworth for a number of favors; to Rufus M. Jones of Haverford College, who was good enough to look over the first draft of the chapters on the Ministry of Fear and the Mystic Experience; to Alice Snyder of Vassar College, who kindly read several chapters and pointed out ways in which they could be improved; to Leslie N. Broughton of Cornell University, John C. French, Louis Teeter, and Ernst Feise of the Johns Hopkins University for answering questions or giving generous help in other ways; to Claude Jones, now of the University of California at Los Angeles, for making a map of Wordsworth's Franco-Swiss tour and for looking up several points; to the members of my various seminars in Wordsworth and especially Thurston Taylor (now of the Hartford, Connecticut, Public Library), Arthur B. Craver (now of Miami University, Oxford, Ohio), Edward N. Hooker (now of the University of California at Los Angeles), Earl Wasserman (now of the University of Illinois), and John Quincy Wolf, Jr. (now of South-

western University), Edward Norris and Adele Ballman (now of the Johns Hopkins University). I have been fortunate in securing as an assistant so competent a scholar as Miss Ballman, who has typed most of the manuscript, has checked much of it, and has offered valuable suggestions as to the interpretation of difficult passages. Part of the expense of Miss Ballman's services has been paid from a grant made to the Johns Hopkins University by the Rockefeller Foundation for aid to research in the humanities. I am very grateful for this assistance. For some of the checking I am indebted to Rowland Evans, Varley Lang, and Marjorie Grafflin; for much more of it to Anne Hutchins. It is a pleasure to acknowledge my obligations to the trustees of the British Museum and of Dove Cottage for the privilege of consulting their books, and to the staff of Johns Hopkins University Library, especially Miss Frieda Thies, for the unfailing courtesy and helpfulness with which all who use this library are familiar. The editors of *ELH* and of *Modern Language Notes* have permitted me to reprint the substance of three short articles which I wrote for their journals, and the directors of the Princeton University Press have allowed me to reprint Chapter IV from *Wordsworth and Coleridge, studies in honor of George McLean Harper* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1939). The material in Chapters III and VII formed the basis of the lectures which I had the honor of delivering some years ago on the Nathaniel Ropes Foundation at the University of Cincinnati.

THE MIND OF A POET

INTRODUCTION

SOME justification may well be expected for entering into a prolonged study of the mind of William Wordsworth. His was not, it may be objected, a great, unusually comprehensive, or even brilliant mind. He was not a Leonardo, a Bacon, a Newton, or a Kant; he had none of Shakespeare's breadth of sympathy and understanding, none of Dante's or Goethe's mastery of many fields; he could not have written the *Comédie Humaine* or the Dramatic Monologues. Furthermore, if we were to attempt the impossible task of selecting from British writers a typical poet we should choose Spenser, Shelley, or Keats rather than Wordsworth. The reason for singling out the author of *The Prelude* as the person in whom to study the mind of a poet is that *The Prelude* reveals with unusual fullness a mind that is fundamentally poetic. Even its peculiarities, its numerous limitations, and its unusual emphases are in the main those of a poet. Besides, poetry—not, as with many other writers, religious or social problems, humanitarianism, science, politics, economics, metaphysics, or literary criticism—was the chief concern of his creative years.

There is one other important reason for choosing Wordsworth as the subject of a study of this kind—the amount of material available. Shakespeare's mind would be a more rewarding subject but we cannot get at it. With Wordsworth, on the other hand, we have a large body of verse, a considerable amount of criticism, over a thousand letters, and the journals and letters of his sister Dorothy. But most of all, we have his chief long poem, which is devoted to the "growth of a poet's mind," and in the unrevised manuscripts, the later omissions, additions, and other changes made in this autobiographical and psychological study we have a wealth of material for the subject of our investigation. His treatment of the poet's mind is, furthermore, of unusual value in that it is not only written from the inside but is an intimate and detailed account of what really matters. It tells us what no one else could have told: it describes incidents and feelings and records opinions, im-

pressions, and beliefs of which no other human being knew anything. In it a person endowed with a powerful imagination describes a youth and early manhood unusually rich in imaginative experiences. Then again it touches, often directly (especially in the early manuscripts), and everywhere indirectly and by implication and suggestion, on matters of the greatest importance for understanding the mind of a poet but of which most persons are scarcely conscious and about which they almost never speak. It is in these matters,—his belief in the ministry of fear, wonder, and mystery, of silence, solitude, and loneliness, in his animism and mysticism, his fundamental and pervading anti-rationalism,—that the sources of Wordsworth's strength and the core of what is distinctive in his thought will be found; and it is in these dimly understood feelings and beliefs, of the force of which he was but partly conscious, that he reveals most strikingly the poet's outlook. Accordingly the following pages will stress rather than minimize the transcendental in Wordsworth and will try to show that the unusual aspects of his mind are not isolated and did not seem to him fanciful or merely personal, but so many paths, difficult, hard to find and harder to follow, leading to the great central truth which is the goal of all man's loftier strivings. This truth has two aspects, the divine and the human: God and "the hiding-places of man's power."¹

Being a religious man Wordsworth felt deeply the truth of the words Saint Augustine addressed to the Deity: "*Fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.*"² Man can rest only in the conception of a supreme Reality, unconditioned and absolute, free from all imperfections and limitations:

Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
Is with infinitude, and only there.³

Wordsworth "looked for universal things";⁴ he sought the one behind the many, the real behind the appearance, the abiding behind the flux, the eternal behind the transitory, the changeless behind the mutable, the perfect behind the incomplete. Even in nature it was the simple, the abiding, and the changeless for which he cared most deeply; and he valued silence, solitude, and lonely places because they intensified his

consciousness of the enduring in the external world, and of the Eternal, the One, which lies behind it. He thought of the "best Philosopher," the child, as one "who . . . read'st the eternal deep," who is "haunted for ever by the eternal mind"; he spoke of "the great thought By which we live, Infinity and God," and of a "mighty Mind" as one "that feeds upon infinity"; he declared "the highest bliss That flesh can know" is the consciousness of being habitually infused by the One; and he recorded the "bliss ineffable" that came to him as a young man when "in all things" he "saw one life."⁵

I have said that the second part of what was for Wordsworth the central truth of life was implied in his phrase, "the hiding-places of man's power." What he meant by this was probably much the same thing as William James meant when he wrote:

The deepest thing in our nature is this *Binnenleben* (as a German doctor lately has called it), this dumb region of the heart in which we dwell alone with our willingnesses and unwillingnesses, our faiths and fears. As through the cracks and crannies of caverns those waters exude from the earth's bosom which then form the fountain-heads of springs, so in these crepuscular depths of personality the sources of all our outer deeds and decisions take their rise. Here is our deepest organ of communication with the nature of things; and compared with these concrete movements of our soul all abstract statements and scientific arguments—the veto, for example, which the strict positivist pronounces upon our faith—sound to us like mere chatterings of the teeth.⁶

It was this *Binnenleben* that Wordsworth wished to reach, these stores of power and wisdom hidden in the depths of the subconscious that he essayed to explore and to make available to man. It was the moments when he had tapped reservoirs of peace and strength, had seen into the life of things, that he wished to record.

Of genius, power,
Creation and divinity itself
I have been speaking, for my theme has been
What passed within me. Not of outward things
Done visibly for other minds, words, signs,
Symbols or actions, but of my own heart
Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind.
O Heavens! how awful is the might of souls.

(iii. 173-80)

This two-fold truth, the one interior life that lives in all things and the hiding-places of power, is, ultimately, the subject of the greater part of Wordsworth's more thoughtful poetry. Nature, the immediate subject of much of his verse, is connected with the more fundamental topic through nature's being a chief means of entering into communion with the One and of discovering and drawing upon the sources of power. It is not itself primarily a source of power but a means of reaching such a source. So with the imagination, which is the subject of *The Prelude*: it is important not merely because it is the life of poetry but because through it we commune with the One and become conscious of all nature as permeated by the One, because spiritual love cannot exist without it, and because through it alone we enter into the hiding-places of power. It is the doorway to the life of the spirit.⁷ The wedding of the mind to nature by the imagination converts fear, wonder, mystery, passion, and solitude into means of apprehending "the great thought By which we live, Infinity and God."⁸ Wordsworth's poetry, he tells us, is "the spousal verse Of this great consummation";⁹ that is, he wished that it should bring about this marriage in the minds of its readers and through this marriage and through otherwise awakening men to a sense of wonder and mystery, to the ministry of fear and of loneliness, he hoped to rouse them from lethargy, to bring them to the highest bliss and to the unfailing sources of spiritual power.

To many persons all this will be mere words, emotional expansiveness, sentimental self-delusion, the reading into nature and into vague feelings of something that is not there. Wordsworth's emphasis upon infinitude, for example, will impress them as a complacent sense of being "in tune with the infinite" which means no more than being out of tune with the definite, the feeling of freedom and exaltation which accompanies escape from the actual into the limitless. They will remind us that such a feeling may be produced by alcohol or drugs and that romantically-inclined persons have usually shown an impatience of social restrictions and physical limitations together with a love of the boundless like that expressed in Thomson's "Infinite splendour! wide-investing all," or in Byron's address to the ocean as "boundless, endless, and

sublime—The image of Eternity.”¹⁰ Man, we shall be told, cannot hold infinity in the palm of his hand; “immeasurable thoughts” and “far-stretching views into eternity” are mere self-delusion; such phrases and the description of a mighty mind as “one that feeds upon infinity, That is exalted by . . . whatsoe’er is dim Or vast in its own being” conceal under vague suggestiveness and apparent profundity their emptiness of real meaning. Their author and his admirers should consider the “Discourse upon the Word Vast” in which St. Evremond pointed out to the French Academy in 1677 that “a Genius Vast and Immoderate, was a Genius that lost it self in rambling Thoughts, in fine, but vain Ideas, in Designs too great, and not at all proportioned to the means that might make them succeed,” that “a just and regulated Extent makes the *Great*; an immoderate Grandeur makes the *Vast*.”¹¹ Such seems to have been the Greek point of view whereas the Egyptians, the builders of San Sophia and Chartres, Michelangelo, Milton, Byron, and many romantics sought to give the impression of vastness.

Now the broad and not uncommon assumption (in part a reaction from Victorian sentimentalism) that romanticism represents disease and classicism, health rests upon a conception of classicism which overlooks important aspects of Greek and Roman life and thought and likewise ignores certain needs of the human spirit which romanticism satisfies but classicism does not. It was to meet these needs that romantic art arose and it is because no other art has met them that it persists.¹² The emphasis of the classicist on order, self-control, the acceptance of reality, the recognition of one’s limitations and learning to live within them, and the romantic dissatisfaction with reality, the emphasis on freedom, living dangerously, aspiration for the seemingly impossible,—these contrasting attitudes are examples of the “standing antagonisms of practical life” which, for the good of mankind, must ever be repeatedly and vigorously presented.¹³ Each is incomplete, each may be, and when it is in the ascendent usually is, carried too far, but each is essential.

A penetrating criticism of the love of losing one’s self in a mystery and pursuing reason to an *altitudo* is to be found in what Mr. A. O. Lovejoy has to say of “metaphysical pathos”:

'Metaphysical pathos' is exemplified in any description of the nature of things, any characterization of the world to which one belongs, in terms which, like the words of a poem, awaken through their associations, and through a sort of empathy which they engender, a congenial mood or tone of feeling on the part of the philosopher or his readers. For many people—for most of the laity, I suspect—the reading of a philosophical book is usually nothing but a form of aesthetic experience, even in the case of writings which seem destitute of all outward aesthetic charms; voluminous emotional reverberations, of one or another sort, are aroused in the reader without the intervention of any definite imagery. Now of metaphysical pathos there are a good many kinds; and people differ in their degree of susceptibility to any one kind. There is, in the first place, the pathos of sheer obscurity, the loveliness of the incomprehensible. . . . The reader doesn't know exactly what they [certain philosophies] mean, but they have all the more on that account an air of sublimity; an agreeable feeling at once of awe and of exaltation comes over him as he contemplates thoughts of so immeasurable a profundity.¹⁴

No doubt "metaphysical pathos" explains much of the appeal which Wordsworth's more vague and lofty passages have for the average reader. It may likewise have entered into the poet's own predilection for wonder, infinity, and the mysteries of being. Yet Wordsworth would never have said with Sir Thomas Browne, "Where I cannot satisfy my reason, I love to humour my fancy";¹⁵ he was not a rhapsodic, vague, expansive person; though passionate he was not what is usually meant by "emotional," not a sentimentalist but a hard-headed, keen-eyed, matter-of-fact man, impatient of inaccuracy in observation or expression. In his more philosophic and rapt utterances, to be sure, he was frequently vague and obscure, but this not willingly or through lack of thought or lack of effort to be clear. He was making his way alone, save for Coleridge's help, through the tangled undergrowth which conceals the "Binnenleben." He was exploring the deep well of the unconscious and he sought to tell all that he saw, or all that seemed significant. He explained it as best he could; what baffled him and what he understood only in part he at least put down; what he felt dimly but could not express he tried to suggest, convinced that

the soul,
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, whereto
With growing faculties she doth aspire. (ii. 315-19),

Vagueness and confusion, he felt, were better than silence; inconsistency and irrelevance than omission. Often he was unable to think his ideas through, to separate them from related ideas, to arrange them in effective order, and to express them clearly. Sometimes he misinterpreted his experiences and impressions, sometimes he did not interpret them at all, but at least he recorded them—honestly, it would seem, and little colored by theory. He did his best, for example, to describe what happened to him when he first entered London, but broke off with the despairing exclamation:

alas! I feel
That I am trifling: 'twas a moment's pause.
All that took place within me, came and went
As in a moment, and I only now
Remember that it was a thing divine. (viii. A 705-9)

This is but one of several occasions on which he confessed his inability to understand what was going on within him or to expound the nature and the sources of spiritual power.¹⁰

Wordsworth's preoccupation with the mysterious, the elusive, and the vague cannot, therefore, be dismissed as mere romanticism; we must seek the reasons for such preoccupation. To this search the present study is devoted. It will give special attention to those incidents in his life which seemed to him most important and will try to discover wherein lay the significance of such apparently trivial events. In order to do this it will bring together what he says about God, nature, reason, fear, passion, solitude, the imagination, and the like and will interpret the incidents in the light of the comments and the comments in the light of the incidents and of other comments. Although it is impossible to separate William Wordsworth, the individual, from those incidents in his life and elements in his thought which are of significance in the study of the poetic mind, it is upon the latter that the emphasis will be placed.

Fortunately for us, Wordsworth himself endeavored in his autobiography to minimize the merely personal and to dwell on what seemed important in his development *as a poet*. We shall see that in *The Prelude* he was really engaged in exploring the subconscious and certain aspects of consciousness to which little attention had been paid, and that he carried out this exploration in the dimly-apprehended belief that in these neglected and hidden fields lay the source of man's true happiness and strength. We shall see that his animism, his exaltation of childhood and of the imagination, his emphasis on fear, wonder, and loneliness are only divers paths to the central point of all his thinking, the two-fold subject of the greater part of his significant verse: the immanent Spirit and the hiding-places of man's power.

The unity of Wordsworth's thought becomes increasingly apparent the more closely his poetry is studied. Many passages which seem to have no connection with one another will prove to be mutually illuminating. To point out such interrelations, to explain Wordsworth by himself, and to demonstrate the fundamental unity of his thought is one of the purposes of this study. This very unity gives rise, however, to a serious difficulty of presentation. The subjects of the various chapters are so closely connected that an adequate presentation of one is impossible without a consideration of all. Nature, animism, and the mystic experience are essential elements in Wordsworth's religion and likewise of his anti-rationalism; yet they cannot all be studied at the same time, and opinion as to the order in which they should be considered will probably vary with different individuals. Accordingly each chapter has been made as nearly independent of the others as was possible, in order that the reader may pass over the subjects in which he is least interested and may take up the various chapters in whatever sequence he prefers. This method has involved some repetition in addition to the repetition which is inevitable in presenting a body of thought so closely unified as Wordsworth's. For, as the subjects of many of the chapters are but different aspects of a single point of view and as there are a few passages and incidents which strikingly present or illustrate this point of view, these must be repeatedly quoted or referred

to. Since the more important topics—animism, the mystic experience, anti-rationalism, nature, religion, and the imagination—are also the more difficult, chapters dealing with them have been put after those which treat of more obvious themes. Last of all comes the subject to which all the others lead up: the imagination, the most essential attribute of the poetic mind. It has seemed well to begin with the unpoetic side of Wordsworth's nature, the side that steadied him, held him to reality, to "the very world . . . where, in the end, We find our happiness, or not at all." So much must be said of unusual feelings, of transcendental beliefs, and "fleeting moods Of shadowy exultation" that there is danger of our mistaking them for the vaporings of a vague rhapsodist instead of the firm convictions of the most hard-headed and matter-of-fact of great poets.

NOTES

¹ xii. 279.

² St. Augustine, *Confessions*, i. i.

³ vi. 604-5. Even Irving Babbitt, in spite of his distrust of romantic expansiveness, agreed: "It is perfectly true that there is something in man that is not satisfied with the finite and that, if he becomes stationary, he is at once haunted by the spectre of ennui. Man may indeed be defined as the insatiable animal; and the more imaginative he is the more insatiable he is likely to become" (*Rousseau and Romanticism*, Boston, 1919, p. 251).

⁴ iii. 109.

⁵ Immortality Ode, 110-13; *Prelude*, xiv. A 183-4, A 69-70, 113-16; ii. A 418-30.

⁶ *The Will to Believe*, New York, 1897, pp. 61-2.

⁷ See pp. 233-6 below.

⁸ xiv. A 183-4.

⁹ *Recluse*, "Prospectus," 47-58.

¹⁰ *The Seasons*, Autumn, 1210; *Childe Harold*, iv. clxxxiii.

¹¹ *Works*, Translated from the French, 1700, i, 368.

¹² Cf. George Santayana (*The Genteel Tradition at Bay*, New York, 1931, p. 16): "Romance is evidently a potent ingredient in the ethos of the modern world; and I confess that I can hardly imagine in the near future any poetry, morality, or religion not deeply romantic."

¹³ See J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, near the end of chapter 2.

¹⁴ *The Great Chain of Being*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1936, p. 11. Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Boston, 1919, pp. 250-1, contains a vigorous denunciation of "the outer infinite of expansion."

¹⁵ *Religio Medici*, section x. See pp. 141-6 below.

¹⁶ For example, ii. 272-81, 346-52, 386-95; iii. 180-90; vi. 592-7; xii. 273-86. See also iii. 116-24, iv. 333-8.

CHAPTER I

THE MATTER-OF-FACTNESS OF WORDSWORTH

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them . . . in a selection of language really used by men. . . . I have wished to keep the Reader in the company of flesh and blood . . . one property of all good poetry, namely, good sense.

Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*

Truth in its largest sense, as a thing at once real and ideal, a truth including exact and accurate detail, and yet everywhere subordinating mere detail to the spirit of the whole—this, he affirmed, was the soul and essence not only of descriptive poetry, but of all poetry.

Aubrey de Vere, "Recollections of Wordsworth"

The peculiar province of Wordsworth is that of the *common*. Wherever selection was possible he held it his duty to borrow nothing from those elements of the world which are marvelous or unusual.

Legouis, *The Early Life of William Wordsworth*

The fundamental thing in Wordsworth's mind was a trust and reverence of his own experience. . . . The apparent matter-of-factness of much of *The Prelude* is the oblique expression of this trust and reverence.

E. M. W. Tillyard, *Poetry Direct and Oblique*

HAZLITT records that on a memorable evening walk to Nether Stowey "as we passed through echoing grove, by fairy stream or waterfall, gleaming in the summer moonlight" Coleridge "lamented that Wordsworth was not prone enough to believe in the traditional superstitions of the place, and that there was a something corporeal, a *matter-of-fact-ness*, a clinging to the palpable, or often to the petty, in his poetry, in consequence."¹ We have Coleridge's own words to a similar effect in a letter to Southey of July 29, 1802, which speaks of "a daring humbleness of language and versification [in Wordsworth's

poems], and a strict adherence to matter of fact, even to prolixity, that startled me." ² Coleridge presumably had in mind not only the passage from *The Excursion* which he cited but "Goody Blake," "Simon Lee," "The Idiot Boy," "Strange fits of passion," the Prologue and some lines about the ass in *Peter Bell*, and such verses as

I've measured it from side to side:
'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide ³

in "The Thorn." This prolix, anxious adherence to reality, this dwelling upon unessential details, is ludicrously apparent in the titles of some of the short pieces: "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree, which stands near the lake of Esthwaite, on a desolate part of the shore, commanding a beautiful prospect," "Inscription, Written at the Request of Sir George Beaumont, Bart., and in his Name, for an Urn, Placed by him at the Termination of a Newly-planted Avenue, in the same Grounds." ⁴ Nor is it limited to Wordsworth's early work; it is found in *The Recluse*, 1. i, *The Excursion*, *The Prelude*, the Fenwick notes,⁵—indeed everywhere.

The early manuscripts of *The Prelude* suggest that if we had more first drafts we should find much more of this sort of thing. In the A text, for example, the great passage about Newton's statue contains the distressing line, "Could see, right opposite, a few yards off" (iii. A 57); the memorable picture of the sunrise which left Wordsworth "a dedicated Spirit" was at first introduced with the explanation,

Two miles I had to walk along the fields
Before I reached my home; (iv. A 329-30)

and the account of the "borrowed" boat originally began with these irrelevancies:

I went alone into a Shepherd's Boat,
A Skiff that to a Willow tree was tied
Within a rocky Cave, its usual home.
'Twas by the shores of Patterdale, a Vale
Wherein I was a Stranger, thither come
A School-boy Traveller, at the Holidays.

Forth rambled from the Village Inn alone
 No sooner had I sight of this small Skiff,
 Discover'd thus by unexpected chance,
 Than I unloos'd her tether and embark'd. (i. A 373-82)

The superb description of the Simplon Pass is followed, in the earliest version, by

That night our lodging was an Alpine House,
 An Inn, or Hospital, as they are nam'd,
 Standing in that same valley by itself.

Ultimately this was reduced to

That night our lodging was a house that stood
 Alone within the valley. (vi. 641-2)

The blue chasm seen in the "vision" from Snowdon was at first located as "not distant more perchance than half a mile"; later this became "at distance not the third part of a mile"; then "not twice the measure of an arrow's flight"; and finally "not distant" (xiv. 57). It took the poet nearly fifty years to realize that the facts mentioned in the title, "Lines written at a small distance from my house, and sent by my little boy to the person to whom they are addressed," meant nothing to the reader; that there was no loss and much gain in calling the poem simply "To my Sister." Likewise he did not at first see that if the purpose of a poem is to commemorate the devotion of a dog to her dead master, it need not include a description of the deceased, of how he met his death, and all the ghastly particulars as to the condition in which the body was found.⁶ As first written, "Resolution and Independence" contained the following pedestrian stanza:

He wore a Cloak the same as women wear
 As one whose blood did needful comfort lack;
 His face look'd pale as if it had grown fair;
 And, furthermore he had upon his back,
 Beneath his cloak, a round and bulky Pack;
 A load of wool or raiment as might seem,
 That on his shoulders lay as if it clave to him.

These needless and ineffectual details are due, as is clear from Dorothy's Journal of October 3, 1800, to the attempt to de-

scribe the leech-gatherer just as he appeared; that is, they furnish one more illustration of how hard it was for Wordsworth to free himself from the actual.

To some extent, then, the prolixity and matter-of-factness of Wordsworth's poetry is due to the difficulty its author found in distinguishing the essential from the accidental. So strong and definite were his sense impressions that in his youth "nor day nor night, evening or morn, was free From . . . [their] oppression,"⁷ and his memory of such impressions was equally remarkable, not alone in its vividness but in its tenacity of details. Of *An Evening Walk*, composed in his eighteenth and nineteenth years, he remarked: "There is not an image in it which I have not observed; and, now in my seventy-third year, I recollect the time and place where most of them were noticed."⁸ Accordingly the artist in him had to be on guard against the tyranny of memory. Furthermore the material he dealt with was so simple and quiet—incidents that seem commonplace and "souls that appear to have no depth at all To careless eyes"⁹—that he found it hard to say which particulars helped to make his account authentic and vital and which weighed it down, which clarified his meaning and which obscured it. The distinction was the more difficult because Wordsworth was an innovator, because *all* of his work seemed to most of his contemporaries tedious and meaningless. Hence, although much of the labor he expended in composing and revising his poems went to the elimination of the irrelevant, the unduly factual, and the needlessly explanatory, it is not strange that his surgery was by no means so drastic as it should have been.

It is doubtful if any two persons would agree as to how much should be cut away. Professor James Sutherland thinks "We are Seven" "oscillate[s] dangerously near the over-particular . . . with the mention of the little porringer, and, still more, with the account of sister Jane, who lay moaning in bed . . . Wordsworth is in danger of overlaying the main idea with an encrustation of inessential details."¹⁰ To others the little porringer strikes the authentic note and the stanzas which speak of the death of the sister and brother are objectionable, not from inessential details, but because they are not child-like and

because they make the little Maid talk too long. The difficulty of the problem may be gauged from the attempt of so sensitive and subtle a critic as Coleridge to solve it. In the *Biographia Literaria* the following description of the Wanderer's youth is quoted as an illustration of Wordsworth's excessive attention to minute matters of fact:

Among the hills of Athol he was born:
There, on a small hereditary farm,
An unproductive slip of rugged ground,
His Father dwelt; and died in poverty;
While he, whose lowly fortune I retrace,
The youngest of three sons, was yet a babe,
A little one—unconscious of their loss.
But, ere he had outgrown his infant days,
His widowed mother, for a second mate,
Espoused the teacher of the Village School;
Who on her offspring zealously bestowed
Needful instruction.

From his sixth year, the Boy of whom I speak,
In summer tended cattle on the hills;
But, through the inclement and the perilous days
Of long-continuing winter, he repaired
To his step-father's school,—&c.¹¹

To Coleridge, all or nearly all of this was objectionable, but Wordsworth omitted only lines 5-12, besides changing the fourth and the last lines. In so doing he seems to me to have been wise, since the opening and closing lines make a real contribution to the impressive effect achieved in the pages that follow.

The same defense cannot be made for seven or more lines, pleasant enough in themselves, in Wordsworth's account of how, while crossing "the smooth sands Of Leven's ample estuary," he learned of Robespierre's death:

Upon a small
And rocky island near, a fragment stood
(Itself like a sea rock) the low remains
(With shells encrusted, dark with briny weeds)
Of a dilapidated structure, once
A Romish chapel, where the vested priest

Said matins at the hour that suited those
 Who crossed the sands with ebb of morning tide.
 Not far from that still ruin all the plain
 Lay spotted with a variegated crowd
 Of vehicles and travellers, horse and foot,
 Wading beneath the conduct of their guide
 In loose procession through the shallow stream.

(x. 553-65)

Here the verses are good and the description of the crowd vivid and relevant; but wherein do the lines about the island, the fragment upon it, and the use the structure had formerly served contribute to the picture of the event that follows? Wordsworth included them merely because they were there, just as he included in the title of one of his inscriptions the facts that it was "Written with a Pencil upon a Stone in the Wall of the House (an Out-house), on the Island at Grasmere." So it is with the numerous details which confuse the account of how he and Jones came to lose their way in crossing the Simplon;¹² the removal of three-quarters of these twenty-four lines would add materially to the impressiveness of the important incident which they introduce.

The truth is that matter-of-factness, practical sense, thrift, prolix explanation, and attention to prosaic detail were as truly Wordsworth as the vision of childhood trailing clouds of glory or responsiveness to the dancing of the daffodils and the song of the Solitary Reaper. It was in the man as well as in the poetry that Coleridge lamented a deficiency. Harriet Martineau remarked that his conversation "sometimes . . . flows on in the utmost grandeur. . . . At other times we blush & are annoyed at the extremity of bad taste with which he pertinaciously dwells on the most vexatious & vulgar trifles."¹³ Another acquaintance spoke of "an inflexible, matter-of-fact manner and spirit in all he said, which came out in a rather hoarse and harsh *burr* that made it disagreeable as well as unimpressive."¹⁴ Still another wrote:

Often as I have been in his company, I recollect distinctly that he never in my presence uttered a poetical sentiment, either of his own or of any one else, except on one occasion. . . . The tone that breathed

through his conversation was one, not of poetry, but of strong, plain, practical common sense.¹⁵

As a consequence, irrelevant and pedestrian details often remain through all revisions. A distressing instance is "that rural castle, name now slipped From my remembrance";¹⁶ the name did not matter but, as Wordsworth had tried to recall it and had failed, he felt bound to record the fact however awkwardly he expressed it. So it is with the lines in which the machinery of the poem creaks:

The song would speak, (ii. 382)

We need not linger o'er the ensuing time,
But let me add at once that, (vi. A 19-20)

The circumstances here I will relate
Even as they were, (vi. A 493-4)

'Twould be a waste of labour to detail
The rambling studies of a truant Youth,
Which further may be easily divin'd,
What, and what kind they were. My inner knowledge,
(This barely will I note) was . . . (vi. A 110-14) ¹⁷

Wordsworth's first volume was marked by unusually exact observation, and at the beginning of his great period the influence of Dorothy combined with his reaction from the abstract theorizing into which Paine, Godwin, and the French radical philosophers had led him resulted in an absorption in the concrete, the immediate, and the contemporary—the phenomena of nature and the daily life of his humble neighbors—which found expression in "The Idiot Boy," "Anecdote for Fathers," "Simon Lee," "A Night-Piece," "A whirl-blast from behind the hill," and the like. Although some of these are excellent, some approach if they do not reach the trivial, and in not a few the interest is psychological or sociological rather than poetic. Here at least lay a danger, a danger that was more acute in *The Prelude*, where the personal might easily obscure the universal and where the episodes, if care were not taken, might become merely events in the life of an individual rather than illustrations of the development of The Poet. Besides, the incidents recorded in *The Prelude* are commonly little things,

undramatic and outwardly unimportant, which must be told vividly—that is in detail—if they are to be felt but from which explanations, unessential or merely personal facts—whatever does not contribute to a vivid presentation of the universally significant—must be rigorously excluded. That Wordsworth always made such exclusion cannot be maintained. Often he forgot his ultimate purpose and told a story for its own sake, or one thing led on to another until he was astray, or he mistook the personal for the essential, or, most often, his matter-of-factness, his inability to escape the minutiae of actuality hampered him.¹⁸

From this danger his poetry would have suffered more severely had it not been derived chiefly from "emotion recollected in tranquillity." The stream of time acted as other streams do, sifting out small things and allowing them to drop from sight. Wordsworth was aware of this service for he told Aubrey de Vere "with a flashing eye and impassioned voice" that the poet

should have left his pencil and note-book at home; fixed his eye, as he walked, with a reverent attention on all that surrounded him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. Then, after several days had passed by, he should have interrogated his memory as to the scene. He would have discovered that while much of what he had admired was preserved to him, much was also most wisely obliterated. That which remained—the picture surviving in his mind—would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene, and done so, in a large part, by discarding much which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic. In every scene many of the most brilliant details are but accidental. A true eye for Nature does not note them, or at least does not dwell on them.¹⁹

Mr. Herbert Read attributes the pedestrian, factual side of the poet's makeup to his "pure northern stock," to the fact that his grandfather came from the West Riding of Yorkshire, where the Norse element was strong.

The type [Mr. Read explains] is distinguished by its hardihood, its pertinacity, and its fundamental seriousness. . . . Yorkshiremen are imaginative, like all northmen, but a matter-of-factness, a strong sense of objectivity, a faculty for vivid visualisation, keep them from being

profoundly mystical. The same qualities make them wary in their actions, and canny in their reckonings.²⁰

Wordsworth himself declares that the district in which he was born "yet Retaineth more"

Of shrewd discernment, ancient homeliness
Than any other nook of English Land.

(ix. A 217-20 with A²C variant)

But all this is only half the story. In Wordsworth's personality, in his literary tastes, and in his poetry, there were forces strongly opposed to matter-of-factness. For there was in him and there appears in his work a deep love of romance,—not the superficial pseudo-romanticism of grave-yard poets and Gothic novelists, but a fondness for "daring feat" and "enterprize forlorn," for travellers' tales of distant lands with strange fauna and flora, for "old, unhappy, far-off things, And battles long ago."²¹ He exclaimed:

Avaunt this oeconomic rage!
What would it bring?—an iron age,
When Fact with heartless search explored
Shall be Imagination's Lord,
And sway with absolute controul
The god-like Functions of the Soul.

("To the Utilitarians," 1-6)

He referred to the

wish for something loftier, more adorned,
Than is the common aspect, daily garb,
Of human life

as "that most noble attribute of man"; he was pleased with the greeting, "What, you are stepping westward?" as "a sound Of something without place or bound"; he was glad that the Yarrow of his imagination was not to be supplanted by sight of the actual stream; and he emphasized the blind highland boy's delight in his perilous voyage and his disappointment at being rescued:

So all his dreams—that inward light
With which his soul had shone so bright—

All vanished;—'twas a heartfelt cross
To him, a heavy, bitter loss,
As he had ever known.²²

Well might Wordsworth write:

Beauty . . . waits upon my steps;
Pitches her tents before me as I move,
An hourly neighbour, (*Recluse*, "Prospectus," 42-7)

for he saw beauty, nobility, romance at every hand: in the old and poor as in the young and gay, in beggars and city streets as in stars and mountains. One of the less-known sonnets illustrates the romance he perceived in unlikely places:

Though narrow be that old Man's cares, and near,
The poor old Man is greater than he seems:
For he hath waking empire, wide as dreams;
An ample sovereignty of eye and ear.
Rich are his walks with supernatural cheer;
The region of his inner spirit teems
With vital sounds and monitory gleams
Of high astonishment and pleasing fear.
He the seven birds hath seen, that never part,
Seen the SEVEN WHISTLERS in their nightly rounds,
And counted them: and oftentimes will start—
For overhead are sweeping GABRIEL'S HOUNDS
Doomed, with their impious Lord, the flying Hart
To chase for ever, on aerial grounds!

True, he renounced "the dragon's wing, the magic ring," and asserted that "the common growth of mother-earth" sufficed him,²³ but it was only at times that he felt thus. There is abundant and varied evidence that he craved more, that only the literature which gives more, such as the poetry of Spenser and Milton, satisfied him. "Crabbe," he remarked, ". . . has great truth, but he is too far removed from beauty and refinement," and he referred to "Crabbe's *verses*;" for *poetry* in no sense can they be called "since" nineteen out of 20 of Crabbe's Pictures are mere matters of fact; with which the Muses have just about as much to do as they have with a Collection of medical reports, or of Law cases."²⁴ Again, in speaking of "Lucy Gray" he said:

The way in which the incident was treated, and the spiritualising of the character, might furnish hints for contrasting the imaginative influences, which I have endeavoured to throw over common life, with Crabbe's matter-of-fact style of handling subjects of the same kind.²⁵

These are not the words of a realist but of one who asserted his "unwillingness to submit the poetic spirit to the chains of fact and real circumstance,"²⁶ who affirmed the true antithesis of poetry to be, not prose but "Matter of Fact, or Science,"²⁷ who held that in verse "forms and substances "

Present themselves as objects recognised,
In flashes, and with glory not their own. (v. 601-5)

Indeed, few poets have felt more strongly than Wordsworth did that their art required the transformation of reality by the creative imagination, few have differentiated it more clearly from photography or the making of phonograph discs.

Yet there can be no question as to Wordsworth's love of the real. "All the little incidents of the neighbourhood were to him important."²⁸ The "Beauty" which, he declared, "waits upon my steps. . . . An hourly neighbour" was "a living Presence of the earth, Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms."²⁹ The Cumberland dalesman, "intent on little but substantial needs," he found

Far more of an imaginative form
Than the gay Corin of the groves, who lives
For his own fancies, (viii. 162, 284-6)

and undoubtedly he expressed his own feelings in the words of the Solitary:

How rich in animation and delight,
How bountiful these elements—compared
With aught, as more desirable and fair,
Devised by fancy for the golden age;
Or the perpetual warbling that prevails
In Arcady, beneath unaltered skies.

(*Excursion*, iii. 317-22)

The poems of Elizabeth Barrett were, he said, "too ideal for me. I want flesh and blood; even coarse nature and truth,

where there is a want of refinement and beauty, is better than the other extreme,"⁸⁰—for

To the solid ground
Of nature trusts the Mind that builds for aye;
Convinced that there, there only, she can lay
Secure foundations. ("A volant Tribe of Bards," 5-8)

He was pleased with the unadorned reality of his picture of the leech-gatherer: "not *stood*, nor *sat*, but *was*—the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible."⁸¹ He proposed in his first significant volume to deal with common life in the language really used by men, and later, in enumerating "the powers requisite for the production of poetry," he mentioned first "Observation and Description,—i. e. the ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves, and with fidelity to describe them, unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the mind of the describer."⁸² The importance he attached to truth and accuracy particularly impressed Aubrey de Vere:

In his intense reverence for Nature he regarded all poetical delineations of her with an exacting severity; and if the descriptions were not true, and true in a twofold sense, the more skilfully executed they were, the more was his indignation roused by what he deemed a pretence and a deceit.⁸³

So exigent a veracity, such an insistence on accuracy of detail, on flesh and blood, such a preference for "even coarse nature" over what is "too ideal" is almost the antipodes of the usual conception of the poetic. Realism is often thought the negation of imagination, and imagination an escape from realism. "Natural objects," wrote Blake, "always did & now do weaken, deaden & obliterate Imagination in me."⁸⁴ Not so Wordsworth; for him natural objects were the ladder on which he ascended into the heavens, into the heaven of heavens. Even in those "visitings Of awful promise," the supreme moments of the mystic experience, although the light of sense goes out it does so "in flashes that have shewn to us The invisible world."⁸⁵ As Professor Garrod observes: "The mysticism of other men consists commonly in their effort to escape from the senses, the mysticism of Wordsworth is grounded and rooted,

actually, *in* the senses." ⁸⁶ A great part of his poetry springs from actual occurrences, and in many cases he is able to tell how and where he first observed the phenomena that gave rise to certain images, the incidents (and the circumstances leading up to them) which suggested certain poems. Imaginative transformation is all-important but, as the imagination is not a playful will o' the wisp but the servant of truth and reason, the materials with which it works must be true, that is, they must rest upon careful observation and sound reflection. Such materials, we should remember, are not limited to the phenomena of external nature but include "the Mind of Man— . . . the main region of my song." Wordsworth's early work reveals a marked interest in human psychology and much of that produced in his great decade turns on the mystery of man and the hiding places of his power; yet whether he treats of man or of nature he has his eye on the object. The leech-gatherer and the small celandine, though not presented as a camera would show them, have been clearly seen and attentively considered. The "plastic power" which abode with the poet was, he explains, "subservient strictly to external things With which it communed." ⁸⁷ Such lines as the following reveal not merely a strong imagination but a love of reality that has inspired close observation:

And, afterwards, the wind and sleety rain,
 And all the business of the elements,
 The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
 And the bleak music from that old stone wall,
 The noise of wood and water, and the mist
 That on the line of each of those two roads
 Advanced in such indisputable shapes;
 All these were kindred spectacles and sounds
 To which I oft repaired. (xii. 317-25)

If, then, Wordsworth's eye was often too closely fixed on its object and his feet were frequently too securely fastened to the ground, these were but the defects of the excellences to which his poetry owed its freedom from the conventional and the vague, its truth, and much of its substance. His unusual sensitiveness to natural beauty and his powerful imagination were like the two wings of a great kite which requires a heavy tail

to keep it steady, head up, and free from the danger of plunging suddenly to earth. As Coleridge remarked: "Without his depth of feeling and his imaginative power his *sense* would want its vital warmth and peculiarity; and without his strong sense, his *mysticism* would become *sickly*—mere fog, and dimness." ²⁸ He himself saw this, for he noted that his eye

spake perpetual logic to my soul,
And by an unrelenting agency
Did bind my feelings even as in a chain, (iii. 167-9)

and in describing the activity of his fancy he wrote:

Yet, 'mid the fervent swarm
Of these vagaries, with an eye so rich
As mine was through the bounty of a grand
And lovely region, I had forms distinct
To steady me: each airy thought revolved
Round a substantial centre, which at once
Incited it to motion, and controlled. (viii. 426-32)

That is, the unfortunate tendency to be unduly literal and detailed was the excess of the virtue which led Wordsworth to feel

The homely sympathy that heeds
The common life our nature breeds,

to see

How Verse may build a princely throne
On humble truth,

to write poems which "deal boldly with substantial things," with "the actual world of our familiar days," to seek his material

Not in Utopia,—subterranean fields,—
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us,—the place where, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all!,

to endeavor in his first significant volume "to give the charm of novelty to *things of every day*," and to remark shortly before his death: "What I sh[o]uld myself most value in my attempts [is] . . . the spirituality with which I have endeavored to invest

the material Universe, and the moral relation under which I have wished to exhibit its *most ordinary appearances*." ³⁹

Now this requires sight as well as insight. The imaginative transmutation of reality rests upon observation and does not consist in throwing a cloud of idealism around objects vaguely seen and imperfectly understood. The poetry of Shelley, great as it is, suffers from the failure to observe either man or nature closely. On the other hand, much of Wordsworth's best work—"Michael," "Resolution and Independence," "Peele Castle," "The Cock is crowing," many of the sonnets, the first book of *The Excursion*, and a great part of *The Prelude*—not only rests upon careful observation but is the flowering of that matter-of-factness, that pre-occupation with reality, which, when unfertilized by the imagination and unpruned by the critical faculty, reduces poetry to the commonplace, the pedestrian, or even the absurd.

NOTES

¹ "My First Acquaintance with Poets," *Works*, ed. Waller and Glover, xii, 270.

² In the *Biographia Literaria* (chapter xxii, ed. Shawcross, II, 101, 103, 108), he mentioned as Wordsworth's "second defect":

a *matter-of-factness* in certain poems. This may be divided into, *first*, a laborious minuteness and fidelity in the representation of objects, and their positions, as they appeared to the poet himself; *secondly*, the insertion of accidental circumstances, in order to the full explanation of his living characters, their dispositions and actions; which circumstances might be necessary to establish the probability of a statement in real life, where nothing is taken for granted by the hearer; but appear superfluous in poetry, where the reader is willing to believe for his own sake . . . a *biographical* attention to probability, and an *anxiety* of explanation and retrospect . . . minute matters of fact, (not unlike those furnished for the obituary of a magazine by the friends of some obscure ornament of society lately deceased in some obscure town).

³ These lines were later removed although they might be justified by the character of the supposed narrator.

⁴ A number of Wordsworth's poems have from twenty to thirty words in the title and even "Tintern Abbey," "Peele Castle," "Loud is the Vale," and "Brougham Castle" are disfigured by long, involved headings. It should be observed that these titles survived many revisions and that often, as in "Written with a Slate Pencil upon a Stone, the largest of a Heap lying near a deserted Quarry, upon one of the Islands at Rydal," they mention details that add nothing whatever. See also pp. 13, 16 above.

⁵ His note on the *White Doe of Rylstone*, beside some of the most luminous things ever said on the methods of his own poetry, records how he rubbed the skin off his heel by wearing too tight a shoe and how he sought and obtained relief " (Walter Raleigh, *Wordsworth*, 1903, p. 28). The impressiveness of the long note prefixed to "Elegiac Stanzas" on William Goddard is destroyed by numerous trivial details. See also the Fenwick note quoted in de S., 564 and the amazing final sentence of that on "Yes, it was the mountain Echo."

⁶ See the early text of "Fidelity" published by B. Ifor Evans in the *London Times Literary Supplement* for June 13, 1936. This early text also has the following lines, reminiscent of the broadside ballad, in which the machinery of the poem creaks (see p. 17 above):

But hear a wonder now, for sake
Of which this mournful tale I tell;
A lasting monument of words
The wonder merits well.

"Simon Lee" likewise, as originally published, contained many details which lessened its impressiveness and distracted the attention from its main point.

⁷ x. 416-20.

⁸ Fenwick note. In this same note he mentions a peculiarity in the appearance of oak boughs in the evening light which he observed when he was not more than fourteen, from which time he dated his "consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country" (Grosart, III, 5).

⁹ xiii. 167-8. Emerson's "Each and All," 13-28, illustrates the point made in the remainder of the sentence.

¹⁰ *The Medium of Poetry* (Hogarth Lectures, II, 1), 1934, p. 22.

¹¹ 1814 version of *Excursion*, i. 108-22 as quoted in *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XXII (ed. Shawcross, II, 108); this quotation follows immediately after the passage cited in footnote 2 above. Between "Needful instruction" and "From his sixth year" Coleridge omitted ten and a half of Wordsworth's lines, either because they were free from the fault in question or because they deal with morality and piety.

¹² vi. 562-85; yet Wordsworth revised this account several times, making many alterations. The needless particularity as to where the city laborer sat when he brought his sick child out into the sunshine (viii. A 845-7) is somewhat curbed in the final text.

¹³ See her letter to Robinson of February, 1846, in *The Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle*, ed. Edith J. Morley, Oxford, 1927, I, 15; cf. *ibid.*, II, 621.

¹⁴ T. C. Grattan, *Beaten Paths*, 1862, II, 107-45 as quoted by Harper (II, 348).

¹⁵ Edward Whately, "Personal Recollections of the Lake Poets," *Leisure Hour*, October 1, 1870. Wordsworth's face, figure, and general appearance, it will be recalled, suggested a mountain farmer not a poet (see Harper, II, 347, 363). John Stuart Mill called him "the poet of unpoetical natures" (*Autobiography*, chapter v).

¹⁶ ix. 483-4.

¹⁷ See also ii. 94; iv. 275-6; v. 293-6, 538, A 630-7 (not omitted by Wordsworth); vi. A 658-62; viii. 476-8; ix. A 541-3, 557-69; x. 513-14; xi. 52-4, 74-5, 258; xii. 1-8; xiv. 369-72.

¹⁸ Yet a comparison of the earlier with the later texts will show that he made a genuine effort, just as a consideration of the poem in its larger aspects will reveal that he kept the development of the poet much more steadily in view than have most of his readers.

¹⁹ "Recollections of Wordsworth" (Grosart, III, 487). The absence of needless detail in "The Solitary Reaper" may be due to its having been suggested by something Wordsworth read, not by any specific incident in his recent Scottish tour.

²⁰ *Wordsworth*, New York, 1931, p. 43.

²¹ *Recluse*, I. i. 703-25; "The Solitary Reaper," 19-20; other evidence of Wordsworth's love of romance is given in vii. 77-84 n.

²² v. 573-7; "Stepping Westward," 13-14; "Yarrow Unvisited," 49-56; "The Blind Highland Boy," 166-215. All but the first of these illustrations are from "Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1803," in which this side of Wordsworth's nature is unusually vocal.

²³ *Peter Bell*, 133-7. The lines,

'Tis mine to tread
The humbler province of plain history,
And, without choice of circumstance, submissively
Relate what I have heard, (ix. A 640-3)

although lamentably true of this particular story, were removed on revision.

²⁴ Crabb Robinson's Diary for January 3, 1839; letter to Samuel Rogers of September 29, 1808.

²⁵ Fenwick note.

²⁶ Fenwick note to *An Evening Walk*. In the same note Wordsworth remarked that the plan of this poem "has not been confined to a particular walk, or an individual place. . . . The country is idealized." Similarly he wrote Scott (May 14, 1808) that "the interesting particulars about the Nortons" which Sir

Walter had sent him "so far from being serviceable to [*The White Doe*] . . . would stand in the way of it . . . a plague upon your industrious Antiquarianism that has put my fine story to confusion."

²⁷ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, p. 937 n.).

²⁸ Aubrey de Vere, "Recollections of Wordsworth" (Grosart, III, 486).

²⁹ *Recluse*, "Prospectus," 42-7.

³⁰ Crabb Robinson's Diary for January 3, 1839.

³¹ Letter to "some friends" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 899); the italics are Wordsworth's.

³² Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, p. 935), Preface of 1815 (*ibid.*, 954).

³³ "Recollections of Wordsworth" (Grosart, III, 486, cf. 488, quoted on p. 11 above). It will be recalled that "The light that never was, on sea or land" ("Peele Castle," 15) was regarded by the mature Wordsworth as a fond illusion of youth and ignorance.

³⁴ Annotations to Wordsworth's "Poems," *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. Keynes, 1927, p. 1024.

³⁵ vi. A 533-6.

³⁶ *Wordsworth*, p. 105.

³⁷ ii. 362-8.

³⁸ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XXII (ed. Shawcross, II, 114-15). Earlier in the same work (chapter IV, *ibid.*, I, 59) Coleridge had praised his friend's "fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed." See also Aubrey de Vere's comment in Grosart, III, 486.

³⁹ "In youth from rock," 53-4; "At the Grave of Burns," 35-6; *Prelude*, xiii. 235, 357; xi. 140-4; *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XIV (ed. Shawcross, II, 6, my italics); letter to Henry Reed of July 1, 1845 (my italics). See also *Recluse*, "Prospectus," 42-71. The pietistic, moralizing tone of the letter to Reed should not conceal from us that Wordsworth is here referring to "creative sensibility" (see ii. 245-61 n.). Pater felt that Wordsworth's peculiar function was "to open out the soul of apparently little or familiar things" ("Wordsworth," in *Appreciations*).

CHAPTER II

PASSION

[The] object [of landscape gardening], like that of all the liberal arts, is, or ought to be, to move the affections under the controul of good sense; . . . speaking with more precision, it is to assist Nature in moving the affections; . . . if I were disposed to write a sermon . . . upon . . . taste in natural beauty . . . all that I had to say would begin and end in the human heart, as under the direction of the divine Nature conferring value on the objects of the senses, and pointing out what is valuable in them."

Wordsworth to Sir George Beaumont, October 17, 1805

Meditation and sympathy, not action and passion, were the two main strings of his [Wordsworth's] serene and stormless lyre.

Swinburne, "Wordsworth and Byron"

An unimpassioned writer, you might sometimes fancy, yet thinking the chief aim, in life and art alike, to be a certain, deep emotion.

Walter Pater, "Wordsworth," in *Appreciations*

MOST persons do not turn to Wordsworth for the praise of passion, nor should they if they mean by the word what Byron meant. Yet where do the emotions receive more enthusiastic and impressive tributes than these: "Passion, which itself Is highest reason in a soul sublime";

The array

Of act and circumstance, and visible form,
Is mainly to the pleasure of the mind
What passion makes them;

The discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these [marvels]
A simple produce of the common day;

"The passions that build up our human soul"; "The strong creative power Of human passion"; "O Nature! . . . in thee

... I find A never-failing principle of joy And purest passion "; " Oh! Soul of Nature! that dost overflow With passion and with life "; " Poetry is passion: it is the history or science of feelings "; " All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings "; " Thanks to the human heart by which we live "; " We live by Admiration, Hope, and Love "; " [Youth's] instinct, its safety, its benefit, its glory, is to love, to admire, to feel, and to labour "; " I was early taught To love . . . unassuming things . . . but more than all The things that live in passion "; " Of these, said I, shall be my song . . . in truth And sanctity of passion, speak of these "; " What there is . . . Of wise in passion . . . I had oft revolved, Felt deeply "?¹ Clearly Wordsworth was not, as Southey came to be, afraid of strong feeling. " Higher minds," he remarked, have

Emotions which best foresight need not fear,
Most worthy then of trust when most intense.

(xiv. 122-3)

In the words of Pater, it was not for " passionless calm that he preferred the scenes of pastoral life; and the meditative poet, sheltering himself, as it might seem, from the agitations of the outward world, is in reality only clearing the scene for the great exhibitions of emotion, and what he values most is the almost elementary expression of elementary feelings." ² Accordingly, in the *Lyrical Ballads*, " Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil . . . and . . . the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." ³

Wordsworth himself was " a man of strong affections "; " his heart, as well as his imagination, was ardent." ⁴ The poet Rogers said of him " Few know *how* he loves his friends," and he said of himself in referring to the line with which he had concluded his volume of sonnets, " Grant me thy love, I crave no other fee ": " This sentiment is, I assure you, predominant in my mind and heart." ⁵ He was easily moved to tears and shared the eighteenth-century tendency to regard sensibility as evidence of virtue; ⁶ he was inclined to think of the heart as the vehicle of insight; ⁷ he confessed that when

living in London he found his delight chiefly in the tender scenes,⁸ that of all sights in Revolutionary Paris, Le Brun's weeping Magdalene interested him most,⁹ and that he was converted to the Revolutionary cause by his feelings not by his reason.¹⁰ It is accordingly not surprising that he attached great importance to the emotions, regarding them as our chief dynamic, our guide, as well as the source of much of our joy, and recognizing that they profoundly affect our thinking. To their development and direction, he thought, a large part of the training of the child should be devoted; yet in practice the intellect receives most of the attention and they are starved or are allowed to grow as they will, often to our incalculable harm:

How little those formalities, to which
 With overweening trust alone we give
 The name of Education, have to do
 With real feeling and just sense. (xiii. 169-72)

The obvious dangers of uncontrolled or misdirected passion are illustrated and discussed at length in *The Excursion* and *Peter Bell*, and mentioned in "Ruth," "Laodamia," and other short pieces.¹¹ In *The Prelude* emotion is considered chiefly with a view to showing how "the discerning intellect of Man" may be "wedded to this goodly universe In love and holy passion" and what glorious results ensue from this union. For, in order that the emotions may have their fullest growth, they must be awakened in childhood and attached to what is beautiful and worthy, to "objects that endure." In proportion as our emotions are "well and wisely fixed In dignity of being we ascend." As to the part family affections, friendship, and romantic love play in this development Wordsworth has little to say.¹² Romantic love that does not lead to higher love he terms "pitiable"—"the Gods approve The depth, and not the tumult, of the soul."¹³ Family affection and friendship he apparently assumed to be indispensable to the beginnings of passion and essential to sound thinking and right living—he himself had been led "by all varieties of human love"

To those sweet counsels between head and heart
 Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught with peace
 (xi. 351-4)

—but they are not passion itself since they are commonly not “imaginative and enthusiastic” but “merely human and ordinary,”¹⁴ since they are often narrow and selfish, and since they fail to waken the average adult and to lead him on to the larger love.

A chief means of calling forth the affections as well as of enlarging and strengthening them is nature.¹⁵ Available to all, “overflow[ing] With an impassioned life,”¹⁶ it easily arouses the emotions and, as it is ennobling and at the same time apart from the individual, it leads to “a love that comes into the heart With awe and a diffusive sentiment.”¹⁷ Herein lies some of the significance that nature has for man. A striking illustration of this doctrine is to be found in the account of the youth of the Wanderer. The boy was educated almost entirely through the emotions and, as these were deepened by solitude and developed by being fixed on “great objects,” his mind was so enlarged and his imagination so nourished that “he had small need of books” and he “was prepared . . . to receive”

Deeply the lesson deep of love which he,
Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught
To feel intensely, cannot but receive.¹⁸

A more explicit statement of the belief and one that relates it to the poet's own youth is contained in the well-known address to the “Wisdom and Spirit of the universe”:

from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human soul
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things—
With life and nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart. (i. 401-14)

By “purifying” he probably means freeing not only from what is base but from what is merely personal, that is, enlarging.¹⁹ It should be observed that, through being entwined with high

objects, even pain and fear, which are ordinarily detrimental, are made to minister to the soul's growth. Here, of course, we have the influence of the associational psychology of Hartley,²⁰ but the emotion Wordsworth has in mind is not the vague, soft, universal benevolence of the eighteenth-century sentimentalists. "Life," he declares, "is energy of love."²¹ By passion he means something vigorous, realistic, and virile; and in his poetry he usually means an exalted emotion having no particular individual as its object which awakens, summons, rouses, constrains its possessors so that for them the universe moves "with light and life informed, Actual, divine, and true." Indeed, some of the more fortunate of them feel "with bliss ineffable . . . the sentiment of Being spread O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still."²² Accordingly, one of the great blessings that passion bestows is that it keeps us from being subdued by the routine of everyday existence and saves us from the lethargy which is spiritual death. When Wordsworth said "Poetry is passion" he meant that it is the record of moments of intense existence. Thus he criticized Dryden's language as not "in the high sense of the word poetical, being neither of the imagination nor of the passions; I mean of the amiable the ennobling or intense passions."²³

Wordsworth may also have felt that Dryden failed to perform the poet's mission, which is to bind "together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society," to stress "the universal heart," ignoring "extrinsic differences . . . Whereby society has parted man From man."²⁴ It was the errors of Godwinian rationalism that brought home to him this unifying power of feeling:

Those mysteries of passion which have made,
And shall continue evermore to make,
(In spite of all that Reason hath perform'd . . .)
One brotherhood of all the human race.²⁵

These lines are much like those in which Wordsworth emphasizes the unifying power of the imagination in contrast to the disjunctive influence of reason.²⁶ Passion is also linked to the imagination in his remark to Mrs. Clarkson, "Poetic passion . . . is of two kinds; imaginative and enthusiastic, and merely

human and ordinary." 27 If for no other reason, therefore, Wordsworth was bound to set a high value on emotion because it was essential to the imagination: "Imagination [and] . . . intellectual Love . . . are each in each, and cannot stand Dividually." 28 Only when he was strongly moved—by intellectual love, by natural beauty, by joy, or by fear—had he known "visitings of imaginative power." It is passion that calls forth the earliest exercise of the imagination, for the babe at the breast

Doth gather passion from his Mother's eye!
Such feelings pass into his torpid life
Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind . . .
Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine
In one appearance, all the elements. . . .
For feeling has to him imparted strength,
And powerful in all sentiments of grief,
Of exultation, fear, and joy, his mind . . .
Creates. . . . Such, verily, is the first
Poetic spirit of our human life. (ii. A 239-76)

If one recalls the passages in *The Prelude* in which simple incidents are made memorable by the transforming power of the imagination, one will be struck by the emotion which accompanied this transformation. On several of these occasions the emotion carried Wordsworth towards or into the mystic experience. He did not distinguish, except in degree, these occasions from the more frequent, less exalted ones; but he realized none the less that most of the great moments of his life were marked by the presence in unusual force of passion, the imagination, and nature. The familiar lines in "Tintern Abbey" which describe the mystic experience relate it to nature 29 and speak of it as "that serene and blessed mood, In which the affections gently lead us on." Thus passion is the link which connects the sensible world with the imagination and makes possible their action upon each other. The assistance which nature renders in developing the affections is repaid later, since the "value" which those who love her find in the objects of the senses is not in them but is conferred on them by the imagination under the stimulus of the affections. 30

Without love, nature is nothing. It is feelings that "plant, for immortality, images of sound and sight, in the celestial soil of the Imagination"; it was "deep feelings" that by stimulating his imagination, "impressed So vividly great objects that they lay . . . like substances" upon the mind of the Wanderer.³¹ It was because nature was "a rapture often, and immediate love," "a never-failing principle of joy And purest passion," a "holy passion" which "overcame" him, that Wordsworth found in her the guardian of his heart and soul of all his moral being.³² It was not nature alone but nature "by all varieties of human love Assisted" that "revived the feelings of . . . [his] earlier life" and led him back from despair

through opening day
To those sweet counsels between head and heart
Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught with peace.³³

The politician, the trifler, the slave to Mammon, and even the genius, "if he dare to take Life's rule from passion craved for passion's sake,"³⁴ find nothing of value in woods and streams.

Vain is the glory of the sky,
The beauty vain of field and grove,
Unless, while with admiring eye
We gaze, we also learn to love.
("Glad sight," 5-8)

In his youth Wordsworth "felt, and nothing else" but when he came under the sway of analytical reason, which is "rather proud . . . to sit in judgment than to feel," he,

Like a cowed monk who hath forsworn the world,
Zealously laboured to cut off . . . [his] heart
From all the sources of her former strength.³⁵

This experience led him to set a high value on the emotions as essential to right living and sound thinking, and may well have caused him to reflect that an eloquent illustration of Godwin's limitations was to be found in his low opinion of passion and its power.³⁶ Men like Godwin ignored, perhaps because of temperamental deficiencies, vital elements in human nature; they overlooked the deep power of joy, of sympathy, and of

early affections and associations. What seemed important to Wordsworth was the "passionate exercise Of lofty thoughts," "meditations passionate from deep Recesses in man's heart," "truth" which is "a motion or a shape Instinct with vital functions," which is

more than truth,—
 A hope it is, and a desire; a creed
 Of zeal, by an authority Divine
 Sanctioned, of danger, difficulty, or death,

"truth . . . not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion."⁸⁷ These phrases may explain for us the meaning of his hard saying, "passion, which itself Is highest reason in a soul sublime."⁸⁸ The lines come in a passage which deals with books, those which the sage has composed with the aid of reason and the bard with the aid of passion; and they affirm that passion at its best, that is in a person of noble nature alive in all his faculties and with his emotions guided by good sense, yields an insight, an attitude, an understanding that is not only as valuable in the conduct of life as what the intellectual reason of the sage gives, but *is* reason in the higher sense of that term, that is, it is wisdom.

NOTES

¹ v. 40-1; xiii. 287-90; *Recluse*, "Prospectus," 52-5; *Prelude*, i. 407; *Excursion*, i. 480-1; *Prelude*, ii. 447-51; xii. A 146-7; note to "The Thorn" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 899); Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, p. 935; cf. "Essay, supplementary to the Preface" [*Oxf. W.*, p. 944], "The appropriate business of poetry . . . is to treat of things . . . as they seem to exist to the senses, and to the passions. . . . In the higher poetry, an enlightened Critic chiefly looks for a reflection of the wisdom of the heart and the grandeur of the imagination"); *Immortality Ode*, 204; *Excursion*, iv. 763 (cf. de S., 553); Letter to Mathetes (Grosart, i, 325); xiii. 41-7 (JJ variant), 232-6; xi. 83-7. In viii. A 630-9 Wordsworth describes the time when man rose to be "of all visible natures, crown" and then adds, as proof of this pre-eminence, that man is "first In capability of feeling"—or, as the final text has it, "first In every capability of rapture." Passion or strong emotion is mentioned with notable frequency and respect in Wordsworth's prefaces.

² Walter Pater, "Wordsworth," in *Appreciations*.

³ *Oxf. W.*, p. 935. The historical importance of the *Lyrical Ballads* was due in part to the appreciation of the passion of the lowly that is revealed in it.

⁴ "Recollections" by Aubrey de Vere (Grosart, iii, 489).

⁵ *Correspondence of Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle*, Oxford, 1927, p. 403; Wordsworth to Henry Reed, February 22, 1839.

⁶ See early draft of *Excursion* quoted in *Early Letters*, ed. de Selincourt, Oxford, 1935, p. 177, lines 15-16 ("I have seen the tear Stand in his luminous eye"); letter to Fox of January 14, 1801 ("a man of your sensibility"); cf. letter to Alaric Watts of November 16, 1824 ("such undeniable marks of sensibility as appear in yours," i.e. your poems) and to W. R. Hamilton of September 24, 1827 ("your verses are animated with true poetic spirit, as they are evidently the product of strong feeling") and viii. A 841-2 n.; ix. 354-63 n.

⁷ See pp. 140, 152 below.

⁸ ix. 74-80.

⁹ viii. A 841-2.

¹⁰ ix. 105-7, 123-4, 267-87, 509-20.

¹¹ Wordsworth referred to "deformities that steal by easy steps Into our heart" (de S., 593, lines 43-5, written in 1798), he warned against mere emotional perturbation (*Excursion*, vii. 363-73; *Prelude*, xiii. 29-31; vii. 671-730), and in a letter to W. R. Hamilton of September 24, 1827, he pointed out that even a poet may be hindered by his emotions: "As the materials upon which [the logical] . . . faculty is exercised in poetry are so subtle, so plastic, so complex, the application of it requires an adroitness which can proceed from nothing but practice; a discernment, which emotion is so far from bestowing that at first it is ever in the way of it." He believed that literature which aroused unpleasant emotions should calm them and criticized Coleridge's "Three Graves" as "too shocking and painful, and not sufficiently sweetened by any healing views" (de Selincourt, *The Early Wordsworth*, English Association, 1936, p. 28).

¹² ii. 232-60; viii. A 69-81; xi. A 669.

¹³ xiv. 176-82; "Laodamia," 74-5 (cf. 144-6).

¹⁴ Letter to Mrs. Clarkson of December, 1814. This letter defends *The Excursion* from the charge of lacking passion, which troubled Wordsworth.

¹⁵ Wordsworth wrote John Wilson in June, 1802, "in childhood . . . they [natural objects] must have been not the nourishers merely, but often the fathers of their passions."

¹⁶ xii. 103-4. A has "With passion and with life."

¹⁷ xiv. A 162-3. Note the immediately preceding and following lines (in the final text 170-82).

¹⁰ *Excursion*, i. 118-300. Contrast *Prelude*, vi. 294-305; *Recluse*, i. i. 593-607.

¹¹ Cf. ii. 175, "Thus were my sympathies enlarged."

¹² It is through association with nature in sports and the like that the boy comes to love her and so to develop his affections; later, through association with her "high objects" the affections are strengthened and purified. At the same time the love she develops quickens his observation of her (see ii. 288-93). Nature and the purified affections then assist the growth of the imagination, which in turn transforms the sense impressions received from nature.

¹³ *Excursion*, v. 1012.

¹⁴ iii. 108; xiv. 160-2; ii. 399-402. This may explain why he found Byron "deficient in feeling" (*Memoirs*, ii, 473).

¹⁵ Letter to Scott of November 7, 1805. On the other hand, Beaumont's painting of Peele Castle was praised as "a passionate Work" ("Elegiac Stanzas," 45). It was because of their "passion" that Wordsworth's own writings had so salutary an influence on John Stuart Mill when he had fallen into a state of serious depression: "What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitements of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings" (*Autobiography*, Published from the Original Manuscript, New York, 1924, p. 104).

¹⁶ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, pp. 938-9); *Prelude*, xiii. 216-20.

¹⁷ xii. A 84-8. The final text has "being" in place of "passion."

¹⁸ See ii. 221 n. and pp. 130, 212-15 below.

¹⁹ Letter of December, 1814.

²⁰ xiv. 206-9.

²¹ Lines 22, 35-7, 41-9.

²² See the passage from Wordsworth's letter to Beaumont prefixed to this chapter.

²³ Preface of 1815 (de S., 531, not in *Oxf. W.*); *Excursion*, i. 136-9.

²⁴ viii. 353; ii. 450-1; x. 418; "Tintern Abbey," 107-11. In speaking of his early communion with nature he says that he was "never long without the heart Employed" (xii. 100-1, cf. 176-7 and vi. A 608). Leslie Stephen writes: "It is not so much the love of nature pure and simple, as of nature seen through the deepest human feelings." And, referring to the beautiful quatrain in "Brougham Castle" beginning "Love had he found in huts where poor men lie," he adds: "Without the love, the silence and the sleep would have had no spiritual meaning. They are valuable as giving intensity and solemnity to the positive emotion. . . . It is when the eye 'has kept watch o'er man's mortality,' and by virtue of the tender sympathies of 'the human heart by which we live,' that to us 'The meanest flower which blows can give Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears'" ("Wordsworth's Ethics," *Hours in a Library*).

²⁵ xi. 350-4 and A 925.

²⁶ "Not in the lucid intervals," 1-13.

²⁷ xii. A 238, A 135-7, 78-80. See Chapter VII, Anti-rationalism. On March 28, 1811, Wordsworth wrote C. W. Pasley: "England . . . requires . . . a higher tone of moral feeling, more of the grandeur of the Imaginative faculties, and less of the petty processes of the unfeeling and purblind understanding, that would manage the concerns of nations in the same calculating spirit with which it would set about building a house."

²⁸ *Political Justice*, 3 ed., 1798, i, 80-3.

²⁹ *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, III. xix. 1-4; *Prelude*, i. 231-2; viii. 298-9; ix. 404-7; Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, p. 938).

³⁰ v. 40-1.

CHAPTER III

THE MINISTRY OF FEAR

Fear & Hope are—Vision.

Blake, *The Gates of Paradise*

I used to steal out of the house alone when the moon was at its full to stand, silent and motionless, near some group of large trees, gazing at the dusky green foliage silvered by the beams; and at such times the sense of mystery would grow until a sensation of delight would change to fear, and the fear increase until it was no longer to be borne, and I would hastily escape to recover the sense of reality and safety indoors, where there was light and company. Yet on the very next night I would steal out again and go to the spot where the effect was strongest.

W. H. Hudson, *Far Away and Long Ago*, chapter xvii

OF the forces which Wordsworth felt contributed not a little to his development one is rarely mentioned, except unfavorably, in other autobiographies and is nowhere else given the emphasis which it receives in *The Prelude*. This is the ministry of fear. "I grew up," he tells us, "fostered alike by beauty and by fear."¹ Beauty may well play a significant part in a boy's development, but fear is commonly thought of as an obstacle to man's progress, as the source of superstition, degrading worship, suspicion, and warfare. What did Wordsworth mean by being "fostered . . . by fear"? Certainly he did not have reference to what he terms "soul-debasing fear,"²—cowardice, dread of suffering, or the terror arising from extreme peril,—but to a milder emotion, akin to awe and a sense of the sublime, arresting, often frightening, and yet stimulating, as danger commonly is, and somehow exalting. This emotion was associated in his mind with wild natural scenery, especially if its grandeur was intensified by the mystery of twilight or night, by solitude, and by inclement weather. All these elements united to mould the youth of the Wanderer:

Through the inclement and the perilous days
 Of long-continuing winter, he repaired,
 Equipped with satchel, to a school, that stood
 Sole building on a mountain's dreary edge.
 . . . From that bleak tenement
 He, many an evening, to his distant home
 In solitude returning, saw the hills
 Grow larger in the darkness; all alone
 Beheld the stars come out above his head. . . .
 So the foundations of his mind were laid.
 In such communion, not from terror free . . .
 Had he perceived the presence and the power
 Of greatness. (Excursion, i. 120-36)

Lest the point should be overlooked the next page repeats,
 "In his heart, Where Fear sate thus, a cherished visitant."⁸
This description is of unusual interest because it presents what
was to Wordsworth a kind of ideal, ascetic childhood and
because the picture is derived in part from the poet's own
early years with the shadows and high lights considerably
strengthened.

But he leaves no doubt as to the part fear played in his
development. The main body of *The Prelude*—for the first
 three hundred lines are introductory—begins with the assertion

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
 Fostered alike by beauty and by fear. (i. 301-2)

Then follow three incidents which illustrate this point. The
 first of these relates how, when he was trapping woodcocks by
 night, sometimes the bird

Which was the captive of another's toil
 Became my prey; and when the deed was done
 I heard among the solitary hills
 Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
 Of undistinguishable motion, steps
 Almost as silent as the turf they trod. (i. 320-25)

The second tells of his hunting for bird's eggs:

While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
 With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind

Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds!

(i. 336-9)

Next comes the story of his embarking in a rowboat one summer's evening without the owner's leave:

When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge . . .
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. . . . after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being . . .
. . . huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams. (i. 377-400)

To drive home the significance of this last episode, Wordsworth introduces it with a reference to "the terrors, pains, and early miseries" which have borne a needful part in making him the man he is, and with the explanation that in his case Nature used, not gentle means, but "severer interventions . . . They guided me: one evening led by them . . ." ⁴ and so on with the story of the borrowed boat. This story is immediately followed by the eloquent address beginning, "Wisdom and Spirit of the universe," in which discipline of fear is again emphasized:

Thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human soul . . .
With life and nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
~~And sanctifying, by such discipline,~~
~~Both pain and fear, until we recognise~~
~~A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.~~ (i. 405-14)

There are several other incidents in *The Prelude* which illustrate the fostering power of fear. Two of these are intro-

duced to show that certain "spots of time . . . with distinct preeminence retain A renovating virtue." In the first, the five-year-old Wordsworth happens upon a spot where the body of a murderer had long hung from a gibbet. As he flees, faltering and faint, he beholds a scene simple enough in itself but invested by his terror with a visionary dreariness which no colours or words known to man could paint. In the second instance he watches, on a day tempestuous, dark, and wild, for the horses which are to take him home from school for the holidays. Thereafter, "the wind and sleety rain . . . The single sheep . . . the one blasted tree . . . the bleak music from that old stone wall . . . and the mist That . . . Advanced in such indisputable shapes . . . were . . . spectacles and sounds To which I oft repaired" ⁵—

Some inward agitations thence are brought
Efforts and struggle tempered and restrained
By melancholy awe or pleasing fear.

(D² variant of xii. 329-35)

During his first vacation from Cambridge he came suddenly at night upon a soldier leaning against a milestone: "A more meagre man Was never seen . . . pallid his hands; his mouth Looked ghastly in the moonlight. . . . From his lips . . . Issued low muttered sounds." After observing the solitary figure for some time "with a mingled sense Of fear and sorrow," Wordsworth subdued his "heart's specious cowardice" and led the man to a cottage where he could spend the night.⁶ Another memory that haunted him, though he apparently could not tell why, was of watching through the gloom of evening a pile of clothes beside a lake, and of seeing their dead owner rise from the water "bolt upright . . . with his ghastly face." "No soul-debasing fear," he is careful to explain, possessed him on this occasion, but the fear that fostered his growth was presumably there.⁷ Something of it must also have been present in the memorable vision of the Druids and their human sacrifices which came to him as he wandered alone on the lonely downs about Stonehenge.⁸

These incidents, except the sight of the drowned man, were all commonplace enough; almost nothing happened in them;

their impressiveness was due to the sense of fear and mystery which was aroused and to the imagination which was exercised upon them. Furthermore only the first three are introduced as illustrations of the beneficent influence of fear. Yet Wordsworth elsewhere pays eloquent tribute to that influence. "Ye Presences of Nature," he exclaims, "Ye employed Such ministry,"

Haunting me thus among my boyish sports . . .
 Impressed upon all forms the characters
Of danger or desire; and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
Work like a sea. (i: 464-75)

Fear, he says, is "deeply seated and . . . strong In a Child's heart,"⁹ and he mentions as one of the defects of the infant paragon whom educational theorists of the day were trying to produce that

natural or supernatural fear,
 Unless it leap upon him in a dream,
 Touches him not. (v. 307-9)

"Real children," on the contrary, he pictures as "full oft"

Bending beneath our life's mysterious weight
 Of pain, and doubt, and fear. (v. 417-19)

Such had been his own experience. When first the holy passion for nature overcame him "the tumult was a gladness, and the fear Ennobling, venerable"; and thus "by the impressive discipline of fear" the country about Hawkshead became habitually dear.¹⁰ Indeed until he was well past twenty-five fear had held him in an "overweening grasp":¹¹

Even to the very going out of youth . . .
 I too exclusively esteem'd that love,
 And sought that beauty, which, as Milton sings,
 Hath terror in it. (xiv. A 222-6)

"While yet an innocent little-one" he "breathed"

Among wild appetites and blind desires,
 Motions of savage instinct, my delight

And exaltation. Nothing at that time
 So welcome, no temptation half so dear
 As that which urged me to a daring feat.
 Deep pools, tall trees, black chasms, and dizzy crags,
 And tottering towers; I loved to stand and read
 Their looks forbidding, read and disobey,
 Sometimes in act, and evermore in thought.
 With impulses that scarcely were by these
 Surpassed in strength, I heard of danger, met
 Or sought with courage; enterprize forlorn
 By one, sole keeper of his own intent,
 Or by a resolute few who for the sake
 Of glory, fronted multitudes in arms.
 Yea to this hour I cannot read a tale
 Of two brave vessels matched in deadly fight,
 And fighting to the death, but I am pleased
 More than a wise man ought to be. I wish,
 Fret, burn, and struggle, and in soul am there.

(*Recluse*, I. i. 703-25)

Hence the fascination of the daring tales, the adventures endless in which his youth did first extravagate, and of the books of travel which delighted his manhood.¹² From the travel books he took for *The Prelude* fear-inspiring episodes in the lives of Columbus, Humphrey Gilbert, Mungo Park, and Dampier.¹³

Impressive testimony to this pre-occupation with the awe-inspiring is to be found in some of the lines prefixed to *The Excursion* as "a kind of *Prospectus*" of *The Recluse*:

Not Chaos . . .
 Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
 By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe
 As fall upon us often when we look
 Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—
 My haunt, and the main region of my song. (35-41)

A similar idea is expressed in *The Prelude*:

O Heavens! how awful is the might of souls . . .
 This is, in truth, heroic argument,
 This genuine prowess, which I wished to touch.

(iii. 180-5)

The assertion that the field which Wordsworth chose as the main region of his poetry was the one which for him had the most awe and fear does not mean that *The Prelude* is a gothic romance, but it does call attention to the part these emotions play in many of the poem's most notable passages:

And I would stand,
If the night blackened with a coming storm,
Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are
The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
Or make their dim abode in distant winds; (ii. 306-10)

The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed, . . .
Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn, . . .
The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream. . . .
(vi. 624-33)

The element of terror in this last passage was emphasized at one time by the addition of some lines which were later withdrawn:

And ever as we halted, or crept on,
Huge fragments of primeval mountain spread
In powerless ruin, blocks as huge aloft
Impending, nor permitted yet to fall,
The sacred Death-cross, monument forlorn
Though frequent of the perished Traveller.

After passing through this gloomy defile Wordsworth slept in a house "alone within a valley,"

A dreary mansion, large beyond all need,
With high and spacious rooms, deafened and stunned
By noise of waters, making innocent sleep
Lie melancholy among weary bones. (vi. 645-8)

There was something in this uncomfortable night and in that spent in the woods beyond Gravedona (where "sometimes rustling motions nigh at hand . . . did not leave us free from personal fear")¹⁴ which made them memorable, and it would seem to have been a vague feeling akin to fear. So it was with

the blue chasm in the mist which he beheld from Snowdon, that "fixed, abysmal, gloomy, breathing-place," "that dark deep thoroughfare" "through which the homeless voice of waters rose."¹⁵ In another impressive spectacle seen among mountain mists the clouds took the form of

implements of ordinary use,
But vast in size, in substance glorified;
Such as by Hebrew Prophets were beheld
In vision—forms uncouth of mightiest power
For admiration and mysterious awe.

(*Excursion*, ii. 865-9)

Mists, clouds, and bad weather attracted Wordsworth just as lonely places, solitude, and silence did,¹⁶ partly because they intensified the sense of mystery, of fear and awe, which mountains, woods, and waters inspired in him. For it was the sublime and terrible in the external world that impressed him most; it was these that came to his mind first when he thought of the ministry of nature. Thus in narrating the growth of his love for man he says that until he was twenty-three man was subordinate in his affections to nature. Then he adds, casually but revealingly, "her awful forms And viewless agencies: a passion, she . . ." and so forth.¹⁷ It was the awful forms and viewless agencies of nature that were his passion; it was "the tall rock, The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood" that he spoke of as "an appetite."¹⁸ Not until he was past twenty-five and his mental outlook was pretty well fixed was he brought by Dorothy to any considerable interest in the quieter, less obtrusive beauties that lay around him.¹⁹

Wordsworth laid great stress upon power: the power of natural objects and forces, of certain works of man, and of the spirit that produced them. He used the word over five hundred times, declared that nature's influence is strongest "where appear Most obviously simplicity and power," expressed the wish that his poetry might "become A power like one of Nature's" works, and pointed out that as a young man he craved power rather than knowledge and that *The Prelude* is chiefly an account of the growth of power.²⁰ Now fear is an emotion called forth by the presence or the thought of power. Even

the joy which is often derived from the contemplation of power partakes (as most of the keener pleasures have in them an element of pain) to some extent of fear. Accordingly, when Wordsworth mentioned, directly or by implication, the ministry of fear, he was referring (often unconsciously, no doubt) to the exaltation, the uneasy delight, and the imaginative appeal which are inspired in us by the ocean, by mountains, by great works of art, and by all objects which impress us with their power.

It would be gratifying to that inclination, common to all scholars, for tracing influences and developments, for showing how ideas pass from person to person, if we could attribute Wordsworth's belief in the ministry of fear to Burke and his followers. For in his *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756) Burke asserted:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (i. vii)

The importance attached to fear in this celebrated treatise was accepted by most writers on literary and esthetic theory of the late eighteenth century, some of whose publications Wordsworth presumably knew before 1798, when he called attention to the discipline of fear in the first book of *The Prelude*. Possibly the reading of Burke or of similar theorists may have directed his attention to the subject and have made explicit his ideas on it.²¹ Lines like the following, which develop a theory rather than depict an experience, may well be the offspring of eighteenth-century esthetics:

To fear and love,
To love as prime and chief, for there fear ends,
Be this ascribed; to early intercourse,
In presence of sublime or beautiful forms,
With the adverse principles of pain and joy—
Evil as one is rashly named by men
Who know not what they speak.

(xiv. 162-8)

Yet if Burke had never written, Wordsworth must still have distinguished between the ministry of awe-inspiring and of

idyllic scenery. Of such ministry Burke's essay, which rarely mentions scenery, has nothing to say. It is concerned solely with psychological and esthetic problems, with the origin of ideas, with analyzing and explaining the sensations and feelings which arise from certain sights or sounds or descriptions. With Wordsworth the feelings are incidental; they are the means. His interest lies in the end, which is the development of character and imagination. Burke takes this point of view when he writes a friend, "To see nature in those great though terrible scenes . . . fills the mind with grand ideas, and turns the soul in upon herself."²² But there is nothing of this in the *Inquiry*.

The realization of the fostering power of fear came to Wordsworth from profoundly impressive experiences of his youth, some of which occurred when he was only five. *The Prelude* and the first book of *The Excursion* suggest that he early became aware of the feeding pleasures to be derived from awe and terror and that he might have applied to his own opening years the lines,

The region of his inner spirit teems
With vital sounds and monitory gleams
Of high astonishment and pleasing fear.

("Though narrow be," 6-8)

Presumably it was not this kind of fear that led him as a school-boy to grasp a stone wall to bring himself back to reality,²³ but some such feeling must have been largely responsible for his belief, which developed early, that there were Spirits, Presences, or Powers associated with certain places or charged with certain tasks.²⁴ He speaks of these in another of the passages which testify to the ministry of fear to his childhood:

Images of danger and distress,
Man suffering among awful Powers and Forms;
Of this I heard, and saw enough to make
Imagination restless; nor was free
Myself from frequent perils; nor were tales
Wanting,—the tragedies of former times,
Hazards and strange escapes, of which the rocks
Immutable and everflowing streams,
Where'er I roamed, were speaking monuments.

(viii. 164-72)

As in most matters of this kind, Wordsworth is vague as to what ministry fear performs and how it performs it, but in the lines just quoted we have a definite suggestion: it stimulates the imagination. This truth, which would be obvious enough without illustration, is abundantly illustrated in the incidents already referred to. These are happenings of no importance in themselves which are made significant by what the imagination does with them. It is, ultimately, on this account that they are introduced into the poem, which is a study of the imagination. Fear is often the spring, the spark which sets the imagination to work, which calls attention to a scene or an occasion that might otherwise be overlooked. It likewise fastens that scene, that occasion, vividly upon the memory,—and Memory, it will be recalled, was the mother of Wordsworth's muse. Thus fear is one means of storing up the material with which the imagination works. It was because he was frightened that Wordsworth retained so vivid an impression of the mountain which strode after him; it was the terror with which he fled from the place of the gibbet that etched upon his memory

moorland waste, and naked pool,
The beacon crowning the lone eminence,
The female and her garments vexed and tossed
By the strong wind. (xii. 258-61)

So it was with the shadows on the lake and the fish that "snapped The breathless stillness" as the boy watched the drowned man's clothes, and it was much the same in the encounter with the discharged soldier. What Wordsworth says of his delight in boyish sports was equally true of fear:

If the vulgar joy by its own weight
Wearied itself out of the memory,
The scenes which were a witness of that joy
Remained in their substantial lineaments
Depicted on the brain, and to the eye
Were visible, a daily sight.²⁵ (i. 597-602)

There was one other ministration of fear on which Wordsworth set no small store. He had always, he tells us, shrunk from the potent tendency

Of use and custom to bow down the soul
 Under a growing weight of vulgar sense,
 And substitute a universe of death
 For that which moves with light and life informed,
 Actual, divine, and true. (xiv. 158-62)

The chief correctives of this tendency he points out in the immediately succeeding lines:

To fear and love . . .
 Be this ascribed; to early intercourse,
 In presence of sublime or beautiful forms,
 With the adverse principles of pain and joy.
 (xiv. 162-6)

That is, fear and love had kept him from apathy, from that deadening of the senses which makes the heavens

A blue vault merely and a glittering cloud,
 One old familiar likeness over all,
 A superficial pageant, known too well
 To be regarded. (de S., 556, lines 141-4)

As he remarks earlier in the poem, the Presences of Nature, haunting him among his boyish sports, had

Impressed upon all forms the characters
 Of danger or desire; and thus did make
 The surface of the universal earth
 With triumph and delight, with hope and *fear*,
 Work like a sea. (i. 471-5)

But this ministry was not limited to the senses. In the lines quoted at the beginning of the last paragraph he refers to the tendency of custom to "bow down the *soul*" and earlier he had written, "By the regular action of the world My *soul* was unsubdued."²⁶ In his own case soul and sense were closely related; yet they were not the same, for he had known a time when keen observation of nature had yielded vivid transport but had laid the inner faculties asleep.²⁷ Spiritual apathy seemed to him well nigh the worst thing that could befall a man; even wickedness was less to be feared—

Oh, better wrong and strife
 (By nature transient) than this torpid life.
 ("Gipsies," 21-2)

Yet it was more or less inevitable. "Full soon," the child is warned,

Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

(Immortality Ode, 130-2)

Awe and fear, startling us into awareness, help to shake off this weight, to thaw the deepest sleep that time can lay upon the soul.²⁸ Wordsworth was therefore grateful for fear:

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and *fears*.

(Immortality Ode, 204-5)

He likewise attributed some part of his democracy to "familiar presences of awful Power."²⁹ Sublime natural objects made him feel that distinctions in rank were like the superior height, extending almost to the breadth of a finger-nail, which set apart the emperor of the Lilliputians. In general he believed that the mind was exalted and enlarged by the fear and awe which darkness, mountains, and vast expanses inspire. Of the Wanderer he wrote:

In such communion, not from terror free, . . .
Had he perceived the presence and the power
Of greatness. . . .

In the mountains did he *feel* his faith. . . .
There littleness was not. (*Excursion*, i. 133-6, 226-30)

Then, too, pain and fear enable us to "recognise A grandeur in the beatings of the heart";³⁰ that is, they give us a lofty conception of man and of his emotions. It is barely possible, therefore, that some remark by Wordsworth suggested DeQuincey's comment: "Arcadian life . . . rests upon the false principle of crowding together all the luscious sweets of rural life, undignified by the danger which attends pastoral life in our climate."³¹

One of Wordsworth's later sonnets begins with the words, "Yes, if the intensities of hope and fear Attract us still." They still attracted him; he not only grew up but lived

Fostered alike by beauty and by fear.

NOTES

¹i. 301-2.

²v. 451.

³*Excursion*, i. 185-6.

⁴i. 345-50. In the second part of the quotation I have used the variant in MS V because the connection between the introduction and the following episode is clearest in this version.

⁵xiii. 317-25.

⁶iv. 371-469, A 420-1.

⁷v. 426-59.

⁸xiii. 312-49.

⁹vii. 104-5.

¹⁰x. A 382-400; i. 602-10.

¹¹xiv. 282-3. In speaking of his early surroundings, he remarks:

But 'twas the image of a danger in them

And suffering man that took my [?]

Man suffering among awful Powers, and Forms.

(Y variant of viii. A 211-12)

It is interesting to find that when Coleridge speaks of the "theme" of *The Prelude* he mentions

smiles spontaneous, and mysterious fears

(The first-born they of Reason and twin-birth).

("Friend of the wise," 12-13)

¹²v. 496-533; cf. iii. 433-44 n.

¹³De S., 600-5.

¹⁴vi. 719-20.

¹⁵xiv. A 56, 58, A 63-4.

¹⁶See i. 416-18 n. and Chapter IV.

¹⁷viii. A 484-5.

¹⁸"Tintern Abbey," 77-80.

¹⁹xiv. 232-66.

²⁰vii. 740-4; viii. 599-600; xii. 44-8; xiii. 309-12; see also viii. 597-607 n.

²¹The influence of graveyard poetry and Gothic romance is marked in much of his youthful verse (see de Selincourt, *The Early Wordsworth*, English Association, 1936) and persists even into *Guilt and Sorrow* and *The Borderers* (see O. J. Campbell and P. Mueschke, *Modern Philology*, xxiii, 1926, 293-306, 465-82) but there is no reason to suppose that Burke's speculations affected these works or that their sentimental melancholy gave rise to belief in the ministry of fear. Wordsworth wrote, apparently at Coleridge's dictation, "Burke whose book on the sublime is little better than a tissue of trifles" (cf. Coleridge's *Table Talk*, *Works*, ed. Shedd, 1854, vi, 293) and commented scornfully on Payne Knight's attack on fear (E. A. Shearer, "Wordsworth and Coleridge Marginalia in a Copy of Richard Payne Knight's *Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 1, October, 1937, pp. 77, 85-7).

²²To Shackleton, January 25, 1745/6; see A. P. I. Samuels, *The Early Life, Correspondence, and Writings of Edmund Burke*, Cambridge, 1923, p. 84. I owe this reference to S. H. Monk's excellent study, *The Sublime*, New York, 1935, p. 87. Mr. Monk shows that the idea of pleasing terror is found throughout the eighteenth century. It is perhaps worth noting that Burke regards

darkness as unpleasant (Introduction, II, iii, vi; IV, xiv-xvi), which is very unlike Wordsworth's conception (see v. 598 n.).

²³ See p. 155 below.

²⁴ See Chapter v.

²⁵ Cf. vi. 211-23; also the remark, later omitted, in the Preface to the *Poems* of 1815, "Internal feelings, co-operating with external accidents to plant, for immortality, images of sound and sight, in the celestial soil of the Imagination"; and *Excursion*, i. 136-8:

Deep feelings had impressed
So vividly great objects that they lay
Upon his mind like substances.

²⁶ ii. 361-2; my italics here as in the quotation of i. 471-5.

²⁷ xii. 102-207.

²⁸ iv. 166-8.

²⁹ ix. A 238; much changed in the final text.

³⁰ i. 413-14.

³¹ "Alexander Pope," in *Collected Writings*, ed. Masson, iv, 259. In his "Letters to a Young Man whose Education has been Neglected" (*ibid.*, x, 48 n.) De Quincey wrote: "For most of the sound criticism on poetry, or any subject connected with it that I have ever met with, I must acknowledge my obligations to many years' conversation with Mr. Wordsworth."

CHAPTER IV

SOLITUDE, SILENCE, LONELINESS

The main romantic motif of solitude.

I. Babbitt, *On Being Creative*

The man I meet with is not often so instructive as the silence he breaks. This stillness, solitude, wildness of nature is a kind of thoroughwort or boneset to my intellect. This is what I go out to seek. It is as if I always met in those places some grand, serene, immortal, infinitely encouraging, though invisible companion, and walked with him.

Thoreau, *Winter*, January 7, 1857

"There is one thing that, if you really intend to follow the course you indicate [the profession of letters], I cannot too emphatically insist on. There is one word—let me impress upon you—which you must inscribe upon your banner, and that," he added after an impressive pause, "that word is *Loneliness*."

Henry James as quoted by L. P. Smith
in *Unforgotten Years*

There is a higher order of men . . . [who] ought to consider themselves as appointed the guardians of mankind: they are placed in an evil world, to exhibit public examples of good life; and may be said, when they withdraw to solitude, to desert the station which Providence assigned them.

Dr. Johnson, *The Adventurer*, 126

IN Wordsworth's temple of Nature the ministring spirits are Solitude, Silence, and Loneliness. The three are sisters and the function of each is the same: to give the devotee the fullness of what is offered. Wordsworth was no hermit but an affectionate, family man, who was keenly interested in the affairs of his country, one who condemned "the heart that lives alone . . . at distance from the Kind," and who made the Solitary not the hero of *The Excursion* but an example of "self-indulging spleen." Yet, as it is recorded of the great Friend of Man that when by force they would make him king

"he departed again into a mountain himself alone," so Wordsworth filled the hidden springs of his being from lonely places, in solitude and in silence. It was within the solemn temple of mountain solitudes that he received his earliest visitations.¹ The wayside brooks and flowers, birds and their songs, clouds and sunshine—the things for which his sister Dorothy had an exquisite discernment and which are the chief joy of most nature lovers—delighted him also, but when he speaks of "The passions that build up our human soul," of the "fellowship" Nature vouchsafed to him with no stinted kindness, he mentions

November days,
When vapours rolling down the valley made
A lonely scene more lonesome . . . woods,
At noon and . . . the calm of summer nights,
When, by the margin of the trembling lake,
Beneath the gloomy hills homeward I went
In solitude. (i. 407-24)

Likewise the incidents in his early years that he dwells on as the most delightful and the most significant usually occur in lonely places, in solitude, and in silence. So it is with his account of the Wanderer's boyhood, "that lonesome life" which is a kind of idealized autobiography: if the future pedlar had not grown up alone in lonely, silent places he would never have been

o'erpowered
By Nature; by the turbulence subdued
Of his own mind; by mystery and hope.
(*Excursion*, i. 282-4)

It was to these features that the events of the Wanderer's youth and many of those narrated in *The Prelude* owed their impressiveness. The mountain would not have "strode after" the young Wordsworth with "measured motion like a living thing" if he had borrowed the boat on a sunny afternoon at Cambridge, and there would have been no dedication if he had returned from the dance with a group of noisy companions.

It is lone individuals, furthermore, who call forth his imaginative power: the discharged soldier,² the shepherd in the mist, the Leech-gatherer, the Solitary Reaper, the Solitary, the

Wanderer, Margaret, the Forsaken Indian Woman, the Old Cumberland Beggar (whose days pass in a "vast solitude"), the persons described in "Lucy Gray; or Solitude," "The Last of the Flock," "The Affliction of Margaret," "The Sailor's Mother," "The Thorn," and "To a Highland Girl." He planned to include both *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* in a single work which he entitled *The Recluse*. Michael is in the main a solitary figure, his sheep-fold is built in "an utter solitude"; Peter Bell's crisis comes when he is alone in a lonesome spot; and Newton is "a mind for ever Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone." This preference extends to animals: the single wren of Furness Abbey, the horse standing alone, motionless in the moonlight,³ the white doe of Rylstone, and "the swan on still St. Mary's Lake," concerning which Wordsworth said:

The scene when I saw it, with its still and dim lake, under the dusky hills, was one of utter loneliness: there was *one* swan, and one only, stemming the water, and the pathetic loneliness of the region gave importance to the one companion of that swan, its own white image in the water. . . . Had there been many swans and many shadows, they would have implied nothing as regards the character of the scene; and I should have said nothing about them.⁴

It will be recalled that "one coy Primrose to that Rock The vernal breeze invites," that Lucy is

Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky,

and that to the loud voice of the Vale but a single "star upon the mountain-top Is listening quietly."

In the account of the tramp through France and Switzerland the incident most fully described is the visit to the convent of Chartreuse,

an awful *solitude*:
Yes, for even then no other than a place
Of soul-affecting *solitude* appeared
That far-famed region. (vi. 419-22)

The summary narrative of his later years at the university pauses for a somewhat extended description of how the poet fre-

quented the college groves by night "through hours of silence" or loitered "on calm clear nights Alone" gazing at a single tree. Even the picture of London has some memorable lines on the silent, deserted streets in the moonlight or late on winter evenings when "rains Are falling hard"; and it is the "silent, bare" city that inspires the great sonnet on Westminster Bridge. No wonder he wrote, "spells seemed on me when I was alone."⁵

It is interesting to find that Wordsworth uses "alone" in the sense of "solitary" some one hundred and fifty times in his poetry; "solitary" (excluding *The Solitary* in *The Excursion*), about seventy-five times; "solitude" or "solitudes" about one hundred and five times; "lone," "lonely," "lonesome," "loneliest," "loneliness" approximately two hundred and fifteen times; but employs "silent" or "silence" some three hundred and fifty times.⁶ His sensitiveness to silence might be expected from his keen awareness of sound,^{6a} but emphasis such as these figures imply is suggestive of the importance he attached to solitude and loneliness as well as the mystic significance he found in darkness. For "the silence that is in the starry sky"⁷ is more than mere privation of sound; so too is "the silence of the seas Among the farthest Hebrides," the silence of the patient, despoiled trees in "Nutting," the "silent air" upon which the Woman in *Guilt and Sorrow* "fed." We are told that the "lengthened pause Of silence" which baffled the best skill of the boy of Winander "plant[ed], for immortality, images of sound and sight, in the celestial soil of the Imagination";⁸ that in silence there is "Music of finer tone; a harmony . . . though there be no voice . . . A language not unwelcome to sick hearts"; that a certain peak "often seems to send Its own deep quiet to restore our hearts"; that star-gazers feel "a grave and steady joy" which is "not of this noisy world, but silent and divine"; that in periods of insight

Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence.⁹

These last lines recall the phrase "Helvellyn, in the silence of his rest" and Nature's promise when she makes Lucy her own:

"hers shall be . . . the silence and the calm Of mute insensate things." To Wordsworth silence was a Power; it partook of the nature of the permanent; in a world of flux it belonged with those eternal things wherein only we can find the joy and rest for which we were created.¹⁰

At the close of a description of the country round about Dove Cottage, Wordsworth boldly asserts, "solitude" (that is lonesomeness in the usual sense of the term) "is not Where these things are." "He truly is alone" (that is, lonesome), he continues,

He of the multitude whose eyes are doomed
To hold a vacant commerce day by day
With objects wanting life, repelling love;
He by the vast Metropolis immured.

(*Recluse*, l. i. 592-7)

This passage is one of the few in which Wordsworth touches on the loneliness of the human spirit. As a rule, whether speaking of himself or of others—Milton, Chatterton, and Coleridge, for example,—he seems unaware of "the unplumbed, salt, estranging sea" that flows between each man and his fellows. He was naturally too independent and he had learned too well "the self-sufficing power of Solitude" to feel any deep need of other persons. Coleridge, who craved affection, remarked: "Of all the men I ever knew, Wordsworth has the least femineity in his mind. He is *all* man. He is a man of whom it might have been said,—'It is good for him to be alone.'"¹¹ Yet for Coleridge, for a small group of friends, and especially for his family Wordsworth cared deeply and upon them he leaned, in certain respects, heavily. For one of his temperament his lot in life was eminently fortunate: what he lacked he did not need, a host of friends and supporters; what he needed he was richly blessed with, the constant companionship of those he loved. Except for two periods, one of which lasted only three or four months, he spent his entire life with or near some one—usually several persons—of whom he was very fond and to whom he was very dear. At Hawkshead there were his brothers and the friend "passionately loved"; at Cambridge, Jones, Mathews, and Wrangham; later there was Annette; then Dorothy and Coleridge; then wife and children.

Only when in London and Paris did he live remote from the objects of his affections,¹² and the emotional isolation of these periods undoubtedly affected his opinion of city life.¹³ In addition to association with those he loved, he enjoyed, after 1795, sympathetic understanding and companionship in the things dearest to him: nature, his way of life, his work. If the general public was indifferent or scornful, Dorothy and Coleridge were a host. No wonder there is little in Wordsworth's poetry of that craving for affection, sympathy, and understanding which is one of the most universal and poignant of human feelings.

Wordsworth was, however, conscious of the isolation of genius, for he remarked: "Possessions have I that are . . . shared by none, Not even the nearest to me and most dear."¹⁴ And in speaking of imagination and the higher love he declared:

no Helper hast thou here;
Here keepest thou in singleness thy state . . .
The prime and vital principle is thine
In the recesses of thy nature, far
From any reach of outward fellowship,
Else is not thine at all. (xiv. 210-18)

Yet he nowhere refers to this isolation as unpleasant. For him as for others solitude, physical as well as spiritual, and lonely places doubtless had their dark side; but he who wishes to see the stars does not complain of the night.

We have noted that Wordsworth uses the words "lone," "lonely," "lonesome," "loneliest," "loneliness" over two hundred times in his poetry, more often than "sorrow" and "sorrowful" or "glad" and "gladness." His use of the terms is distinctive since he commonly applies them to places or natural objects, rarely to states of mind, and almost always employs them to suggest something that is desirable. A typical instance is the November mists which "rolling down the valley made A lonely scene more lonesome." Here, as in the reference three lines later to "gloomy hills," nature is thought of as attractive because lonely. So the "sweet Recess . . . Of hidden beauty" in which the Solitary immured himself is "lonesome" but "not melancholy."¹⁵ Inversneyde, which in-

spired the lines "To a Highland Girl," is described as a "lonely place" almost too lovely to be real—"like something fashioned in a dream." Indeed, Wordsworth's conception of perfect bliss is living with the maid one loves "in some lonely spot."¹⁶ Such was the happiness Ruth dreamed of sharing with the Youth from Georgia on the "lonesome floods, And green savannahs" of the new world, such the idyllic life of the Solitary and his bride upon the "lonely Downs."¹⁷ The idealized Indian is pictured as "free as the sun, and lonely as the sun"; and the loneliness of the Wanderer's youth—which is conceived as a kind of Spartan ideal—is repeatedly insisted on.¹⁸ There are a number of references to the pleasure the poet found in lonely roads and one notable sonnet on his delight in "long, barren silence" by his cottage fire.¹⁹ His sister also wrote, "We shall then in right earnest enjoy winter quiet and loneliness."²⁰

Dorothy's realization of the part loneliness played in her brother's spiritual life seems to be indicated in her naming after him a "lonely Summit," "the loneliest place we have among the clouds."²¹ Raisley Calvert likewise, the poet tells us, "deem'd that my delights and labours lay Among the lonely places of the earth."²² Yet, as the part lonely places had in Wordsworth's development has often been overlooked, it may be well to recall how many of the notable incidents recorded in *The Prelude* owe much of their significance to the loneliness of their setting: the robbed trap, the stolen boat ride, bird-nesting "on the lonesome peaks," standing, "if the night blackened with a coming storm, Beneath some rock," the first circuit of the lake after returning from Cambridge, the encounter with the discharged soldier, the passage through the "gloomy strait" in the Alps, the night after leaving Gravedona, the coming upon the place of the gibbet, the watch for the palfreys to take him home, the vision of the Druids on Salisbury Plain, and the ascent of Snowdon. But his gratitude for the intercourse that had been his in loneliness was probably less for these incidents than for innumerable occasions when there had been nothing to record save the consciousness of the austere beauty—beauty which often had terror in it—of solitary tarns, uninhabited valleys, and bare mountain sides half hid

in mists, wherewith his spirit had been fed. Hence it was that Wordsworth thought of the "high-souled Bard" as "trained in lonely woods," that when speaking of the ministry of Nature he invoked the "Visions of the hills! And Souls of lonely places," that the "fellowship vouchsafed" so richly in his youth immediately suggested "a lonely scene [made] more lonesome."²³

This added lonesomeness was achieved, it will be recalled, by November mists, which may direct our attention to another feature common to many of the incidents just enumerated—bad weather.²⁴ Wordsworth has warm praise for the pastoral life described by Latin poets or observed by himself on the endless plains of the North, but he adds:

Yet, hail to you
Moors, mountains, headlands, and ye hollow vales . . .
Powers of my native region! Ye that seize
The heart with firmer grasp! Your snows and streams
Ungovernable, and your terrifying winds,
That howl so dismally for him who treads
Companionless your awful solitudes! (viii. 215-22)

Even Green-head Ghyll and the fastness of the Solitary smiled and grew friendly in the sunshine; for perfect loneliness one needed the mists and winds that are the usual play-fellows of mountains. Hence in offering his thanks to nature as the source of whatever is best in him, he addresses

Ye mountains, and ye lakes
And sounding cataracts, ye mists and winds
That dwell among the hills where I was born,
(ii. 424-6)

and he speaks of the "Genius" that dwells in the mountains and "can subdue" the ephemeral products of the plain as "most potent when mists veil the sky."²⁵

Clouds and mist, wind and rain were dear to Wordsworth not merely because he was accustomed to them but because they reinforced and concentrated what lonely places had to offer, just as loneliness and silence made more potent the ministry of solitude, and all four when united gave to mountains their supreme impressiveness and mystery and, on especially

fortunate occasions, prepared the way for spiritual experiences akin to the mystic. Accordingly, Wordsworth's love of solitude and lonely places has none of the self-conscious and self-admiring sentimentalism of the eighteenth-century graveyard poets, the wistful backward glance of the picturesque travellers, or the introspective exhibitionism of later romantics who nourished their morbid egoism with the untamed wildness and sublimity of mountain solitudes. Behind the sonorous periods of Byron's

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and Music in its roar,

we catch echoes of the less sincere "I have not loved the World, nor the World me." ²⁶ When Wordsworth climbed to the lonely Grisedale Tarn or descended the mist-filled Kirkstone Pass his meditations were not of himself nor of the world. Werther and Manfred sought solitude to feed their melancholy; Wordsworth to feed his "lofty speculations." The Spirit of Nature as he had come to know it among the mountains was not one of lawlessness but of "Composure, and ennobling Harmony"; in waste places he did not see his own ego writ large; he was conscious of "the one Presence," "the Upholder of the tranquil soul." ²⁷ Thus he is classical in his disapproval of melancholy and virile in his love of lonely mountain retreats.

In a ~~revealing comment on his life~~ at Cambridge he explains:

Yet could I only cleave to solitude
In lonely places; if a throng was near
That way I leaned by nature; for my heart
Was social, and loved idleness and joy. (iii. 233-6)

The early books of *The Prelude* certainly bear out this characterization: as a boy and young man Wordsworth loved companionship and sports and was alone by chance rather than choice. It was on this account that he needed lonely places. His palms, like those of most strong men, were doubtless not so easily won as we think. He knew it was the hills from

whence came his strength but he did not always look up unto them; in consequence he was

thankful, even though tired and faint,
For the rich bounties of constraint;
Whence oft invigorating transports flow
That choice lacked courage to bestow!

("Pass of Kirkstone," 57-60)

His first year at the university illustrates his need of the help which the lake region had given him. Cambridge afforded no mountains and few lonely places, and without these there was for him no real solitude; as a result he filled his life with trivial things—"to the deep quiet and majestic thoughts Of loneliness succeeded empty noise,"²⁸ And he was happy; not until his return to Hawkshead did he sense what he had missed. But on a cold, raw evening when once again he made the circuit of Esthwaite,

a comfort seemed to touch
A heart that had not been disconsolate:
Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
At least not felt; and restoration came
Like an intruder knocking at the door
Of unacknowledged weariness. (iv. 153-8)

The ministry of lonely places was in part purely negative; they isolated him, physically and spiritually, from worldly concerns; they subdued the trivial and the transitory. Such service was particularly valuable to one whose mind was not quick or brilliant but was given to brooding for long periods over profound problems. Waste places turned his thoughts to such problems and stimulated his meditations upon them. They also uplifted him, bringing tranquil restoration, "the deep quiet and majestic thoughts Of loneliness," and giving new energy and vitality to old convictions. Among the mountains, as the Wanderer found, "all things "

Breathed immortality, revolving life,
And greatness still revolving; infinite:
There littleness was not; the least of things
Seemed infinite; and there his spirit shaped
Her prospects, nor did he believe,—he *saw*.

NOTES

¹ xiv. 139-41.

² In both the early and the late descriptions of the meeting with the discharged soldier Wordsworth stressed silence, solitude, and loneliness. He began by referring to the pleasure he found in a

public Way, when, for the night
Deserted, in its silence it assumes
A character of deeper quietness
Than pathless solitudes. (iv. A 365-8)

Later he changed this to:

When from our better selves we have too long
Been parted by the hurrying world, and droop,
Sick of its business, of its pleasures tired,
How gracious, how benign, is Solitude. (iv. 354-7)

Then he tells of stealing along a "silent road . . . from the stillness drinking in A restoration . . . all was peace and solitude . . . the solitude . . . was heard and felt" (A 385-91). Instead of these last lines the final text has

All else was still;
No living thing appeared in earth or air,
And, save the flowing water's peaceful voice,
Sound there was none—but, lo! an uncouth shape. (384-7)

Turning again to A:

He was alone,
Had no attendant, neither Dog, nor Staff,
Nor knapsack; in his very dress appear'd
A desolation, a simplicity
That seem'd akin to solitude . . . at his feet
His shadow lay, and mov'd not. (A 415-25)

³ ii. 118-28; de S., 601-2, lines 31-47.

⁴ Aubrey de Vere, "Recollections of Wordsworth" (Grosart, III, 487-8).

⁵ vi. 66-94; vii. 654-68; iii. 232. See also xiii. A 319-20.

⁶ Compare these with the following approximate figures: "rejoice" etc., eighty-five times; "sorrow," "sorrowful," and the like, two hundred times; "glad," "gladness," and the like, two hundred times; "hope" etc. (omitting "hopeless"), six hundred times; "stream," "streams," "streamlet," three hundred; "soul," "souls," etc., five hundred and thirty times; "sky," "skies," three hundred times. See also F. B. Snyder, "Wordsworth's Favorite Words," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, xxii (1923), 253-6.

^{7a} See i. 82-5 n.

⁷ "Brougham Castle," 163. In *The Recluse*, i. i. 129-33, "the voice Of lordly birds" admonishes man "of solitude, and silence in the sky"; in "The Idiot Boy," 245-6, the town "is silent as the skies"; in "A volant Tribe," 14, the sky is "more than silent."

⁸ Preface of 1815, a passage omitted in the 1845 and later reprintings of the Preface, not to be found in the editions of Hutchinson or Grosart, and incorrecly printed in Knight's edition of the *Prose Works*. The lines cited just above are from "The Solitary Reaper," 15-16; "Nutting," 52-3; *Guilt and Sorrow*, 341.

* *Excursion*, ii. 710-16; "There is an Eminence," 7-8; "Star-gazers," 26-8; Immortality Ode, 158-9 (cf. "On the Power of Sound," 217-18,

O Silence! are Man's noisy years
No more than moments of thy life?).

According to *The Excursion* a man on a mountain top is privileged

To breathe in solitude, above the host
Of ever-humming insects . . .

murmur of the leaves

Many and idle, visits not his ear:
This he is freed from, and from thousand notes
(Not less unceasing, not less vain than these,)
By which the finer passages of sense
Are occupied; and the Soul, that would incline
To listen, is prevented or deterred.

(ix. 72-80)

Two of the four sonnets written at Dover are devoted to the spiritual ministry of silence, the latest having the lines:

Ocean's o'erpowering murmurs have set free
Thy sense from pressure of life's common din.

¹⁰ "To the Clouds," 92-4; cf. i. 409. The passages quoted just above are from viii. 14 and "Three years she grew," 16-18. Others that might be added will be found in *Excursion*, iv. 414-15; "Yew Trees," 27; "Personal Talk," i. 9-10.

¹¹ *Table Talk*, ed. T. Ashe, 1903, p. 339. Eliza Hamilton said of Wordsworth, "Other men did not seem necessary to him, or to the existence of his happiness" (R. P. Graves, *Life of W. R. Hamilton*, 1878-91, I, 311-14).

¹² To be sure, Wordsworth was not in London all of the two and two-thirds years between his second return from France and his settling at Racedown, but much of the time when he was absent from the metropolis he spent with Jones, with Dorothy, and with Raisley Calvert.

¹³ See p. 451, n. 3, vii. 679-81 n. Observe that in the passage quoted just above it is the city dweller who is said to be lonely.

¹⁴ *Recluse*, I. i. 686-8.

¹⁵ i. 416-18; *Excursion*, ii. 349-55 (a later reference to the same spot mentions "the loneliness of this sublime retreat," iv. 372).

¹⁶ xiii. 120-7 and A²C variant of A 131-2. The final text has "in some lone nook."

¹⁷ "Ruth," 110-14; *Excursion*, iii. 532.

¹⁸ *Excursion*, iii. 941 (cf. *Prelude*, vii. 745-7), i. 126-31, 219, 262, and especially 100, "The feeling pleasures of his loneliness."

¹⁹ iv. A 363-99; xiii. 117-19, 162; "Loud is the Vale," 11-12; "Personal Talk," i. 10.

²⁰ Letter to Lady Beaumont of November 29, 1805.

²¹ "There is an Eminence," 17, 13.

²² Y variant of xiv. A 362-5.

²³ "To Enterprise," 91-2; *Prelude*, i. 464-6, 415-18.

²⁴ See i. 416-18 n.

²⁵ "The Pass of Kirkstone," 33-8.

²⁶ *Child Harold*, III. cxiii. Indeed the stanza preceding the one quoted above (*ibid.*, iv. clxxviii) has the lines:

Oh! that the Desert were my dwelling-place . . .
That I might all forget the human race.

What is said here of Wordsworth refers to his maturity. In his youth, as he

himself confesses (vi. 547-61), "Dejection taken up for pleasure's sake" was a mood not unknown; see vi. 171-8 n.; it is certainly present in *Descriptive Sketches*.

²⁷ vii. 766-71; iii. A 130, 120.

²⁸ iii. A 210-11. Even if the "visitings Of the Upholder of the tranquil soul" (119-20) described in iii. 90-169 took place at this time and not later, the general character of the year, as Wordsworth repeatedly insists, was idle amusement (see p. 338 below). In London, Paris, Orleans, and Blois he saw equally little of lonely places, and this fact may explain in part why the years spent in these cities were relatively barren of the sublunary things so richly bestowed during the brief tramp through the lonely Alps.

²⁹ *Oxford Lectures*, p. 142.

³⁰ vii. 740-4; note viii. 599-600, "seeking knowledge at that time Far less than craving power." Hazlitt wrote: "There is little mention of mountainous scenery in Mr. Wordsworth's poetry; but by internal evidence one might be almost sure that it was written in a mountainous country, from its bareness, its simplicity, its loftiness and its depth!" (*Spirit of the Age, Works*, ed. Waller and Glover, iv, 274).

CHAPTER V

ANIMISM

Animism, or that sense of something in nature which to the enlightened or civilized man is not there, and in the civilized man's child, if it be admitted that he has it at all, is but a faint survival of a phase of the primitive mind. And by animism I do not mean the theory of a soul in nature, but the tendency or impulse or instinct, in which all myth originates, to *animate* all things; the projection of ourselves into nature; the sense and apprehension of an intelligence like our own but more powerful in all visible things. . . . I know that in me, old as I am, this same primitive faculty which manifested itself . . . in those early years was so powerful that I am almost afraid to say how deeply I was moved by it.

W. H. Hudson, *Far Away and Long Ago*, chapter xvii

I swear I think now that every thing without exception has
an eternal soul!

The trees have, rooted in the ground! the weeds of the sea
have! the animals!

Whitman, "To Think of Time"

And so it came about that this sense of a life in natural objects, which in most poetry is but a rhetorical artifice, is with Wordsworth the assertion of what for him is almost literal fact. To him every natural object seemed to possess more or less of a moral or spiritual life, to be capable of a companionship with man, full of expression, of inexplicable affinities and delicacies of intercourse. An emanation, a particular spirit, belonged, not to the moving leaves or water only, but to the distant peak of the hills arising suddenly, by some change of perspective, above the nearer horizon, to the passing space of light across the plain, to the lichened Druidic stone even, for a certain weird fellowship in it with the moods of men.

Walter Pater, "Wordsworth," in *Appreciations*

I assure you, I have never given way to my own feelings in personifying natural objects, or investing them with sensation,

without bringing all that I have said to a rigorous after-test of good sense, as far as I was able to determine what good sense is.

Wordsworth to W. R. Hamilton, December 23, 1829

WHEN Shakespeare speaks of daffodils

That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty,

when Milton mentions "the unseen Genius of the wood," when Blake sighs

Ah sunflower weary of time
Who countest the steps of the sun!,

when Keats refers to

Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,
Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,

we accept their words as metaphors with no thought of literal truth. So it is with Wordsworth's daffodils "tossing their heads in sprightly dance"; so with the "delight" with which the moon "look[s] round her when the heavens are bare"; so with

that deep farewell light by which
The setting sun proclaims the love he bears
To mountain regions. (viii. A 117-19)

Likewise, when (using a less familiar form of expression) he says that he greeted "strange fields or groves, Which lacked not voice to welcome me in turn"; when he begs the "Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves" to "forebode not any severing of *our* loves"; even when he asserts more definitely of the spring flowers, the birds, and budding twigs, "I must think, do all I can, That there was pleasure there,"¹ still we regard this as a pretty fancy but as little else. The lines on the small celandine,

It doth not love the shower, nor seek the cold:
This neither is its courage nor its choice,
But its necessity in being old,

are admirable poetry but are they anything more?

Undoubtedly literary convention enters into such passages, just as it seems to be almost entirely responsible for expressions like "the Genius of the flood" and "the Genius of our hills—Who seems . . . desirous not alone To keep his own, but also to exclude All other progeny." ² So, too, the personification which is common in poetry accounts for many of Wordsworth's references to spirits and powers, even when these words are capitalized.³ For example, MS D has in place of xii. 9-11:

Ye sunbeams, glancing over the green hills,
Ye spirits of air, that league your strength to rouse
The sea . . . ye whose intercourse
With breathing flowers. . . .

Later, "Ye spirits of air . . ." became "ye breezes and soft airs, Whose subtle intercourse . . .,"—which presumably is all the lines in D meant. The same is true of the invocation, "Yet, hail to you Moors, mountains . . . Powers of my native region! Ye that seize The heart"; here, however, the personification appears only in the final text. Some vague sense of personality may lie behind the sonnet in which *Twilight* is hailed as an "Ancient Power" and the address to *Imagination* as an "awful Power [which] rose . . . Like an unfathered vapour," but to call imaginative minds, Christian leaders, and books "Powers" is little more than a figure of speech.⁴ So with Wordsworth's wish that a work of his might "become A power like one of Nature's," with his speaking of the voice of a shepherd as "a spirit of coming night," or of the shepherd himself as

a lord and master, or a power,
Or genius, under Nature, under God,
Presiding,

or his reference to

those bold fictions that, by deeds assigned
To the Valerian, Fabian, Curian Race,
And others like in fame, created Powers
With attributes . . . propitious to high aims.⁵

There are other personifications and references to powers and spirits that are purely literary,⁶ just as there are lines, and not

all of them late, which speak of spirits as any conventional, orthodox poet might speak.⁷

Yet one cannot read Wordsworth attentively without suspecting that what with other poets is the pathetic fallacy⁸ represents in his case if not a conviction at least a persistent, instinctive feeling. Indeed, we have his own word for it:

And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

That is, he conceived of objects not as the passive recipients of the One Life, but as sharing its activity; "the forms Of Nature have a passion in themselves";

To every Form of being is assigned, . . .
An *active* Principle:—howe'er removed
From sense and observation, it subsists
In all things, in all natures; in the stars . . .
In flower and tree, in every pebbly stone . . .
The moving waters, and the invisible air;
How does the Meadow-flower its bloom unfold?
Because the lovely little flower is free
Down to its root, and, in that freedom, bold;
And so the grandeur of the Forest-tree
Comes not by casting in a formal mould,
But from its *own* divine vitality.⁹

Furthermore, Wordsworth possessed to an unusual degree the power of recalling or conceiving vivid sensory images:

And, afterwards, the wind and sleety rain . . .
The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
And the bleak music from that old stone wall . . .
All these were kindred spectacles and sounds
To which I oft repaired, and thence would drink,
As at a fountain. (xii. 317-26)

He declared that the scenes of his boyish pleasures

Remained in their substantial lineaments
Depicted on the brain, and to the eye
Were visible, a daily sight. (i. 599-602)

In his account of the Wanderer's youth, which is presumably autobiographical, he wrote:

While yet a child, and long before his time,
 Had he perceived the presence and the power
 Of greatness; and deep feelings had impressed
 So vividly great objects that they lay
 Upon his mind like substances, whose presence
 Perplexed the bodily sense. . . .

. . . he thence attained

An active power to fasten images
 Upon his brain; and on their pictured lines
 Intensely brooded, even till they acquired
 The liveliness of dreams. (*Excursion*, i. 134-48)

A poet, he affirmed, is "affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present."¹⁰ With Blake this faculty was so vivid that he seems to have had difficulty in distinguishing what he conceived from what he perceived, and Shelley, it will be remembered, once ran shrieking from the room when he thought of a woman whose nipples were replaced by eyes.¹¹ These extreme manifestations of the image-making power were, characteristically, not Wordsworth's; yet, when he came to describe the impression made on him fourteen years earlier by the news that he and Jones had crossed the Alps, he said:

Imagination . . .

In all the might of its endowments, came
 Athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud,
 Halted, without a struggle to break through.

(vi. A 525-30)

And such was the power of his mind over his body that as a boy he "had to push against something that resisted, to be sure that there was anything outside of" himself.¹²

With this vivid sense of the reality of the immaterial went a tendency to personify objects and to conceive of tendencies, influences, and forces as Beings endowed with life and personality. Thus he remarked that in London he

conversed with majesty and power
 Like independent natures. Hence the place
 Was thronged with impregnations. (viii. 631-3)

On Christmas Eve, 1799, he wrote Coleridge: "Besides, am I fanciful when I would extend the obligation of gratitude to

insensate things? May not a man have a salutary pleasure in doing something gratuitously for the sake of his house, as for an individual to which he owes so much?" When snaring woodcocks by night he seemed to himself "to be a trouble to the peace That dwelt among" the hills; he conceived the child's "Immortality" as brooding over it like the Day, "a Presence which is not to be put by"; and he affirmed "Beauty—a living Presence of the earth . . . waits upon my steps."¹³ In speaking of his own endowment as a poet he mentioned

general Truths, which are themselves a sort
Of Elements and Agents, Under-powers,
Subordinate helpers of the living mind. (i. 151-3)

He referred to the influence of Grasmere as "the voice Which speaks from a presiding Spirit here," and to the "winds And roaring waters," the "lights and shades That marched . . . about the hills" as "Powers on whom I daily waited."¹⁴ On one occasion he described the Pastor in *The Excursion* as

Enrapt, as if his inward sense perceived
The prolongation of some still response,
Sent by the ancient Soul of this wide land,
The Spirit of its mountains and its seas,
Its cities, temples, fields, its awful power,
Its rights and virtues—by that Deity
Descending, and supporting his pure heart.
(*Excursion*, vii. 894-900)

The transformation of Peter Bell he attributed to "Spirits of the Mind"—not Spirits in whose objective existence Wordsworth believed, but psychological forces, Peter's conscience, fears, and superstitions, which made him interpret natural sights and sounds as supernatural agencies.¹⁵ So a mental breakdown is ascribed to "dread Powers, that work in mystery, spin Entanglings of the brain."¹⁶ So in the noble address to Toussaint L'Ouverture:

Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

A similar personification, this time of external forces that affect the mind, seems to be implied in the familiar lines,

Nor less I deem that there are Powers
Which of themselves our minds impress.

("Expostulation and Reply," 21-2)

When this personifying tendency is applied to external nature as a whole it is not easily distinguished from the pantheism to which Wordsworth was inclined:

Oh! soul of Nature, excellent and fair,
That didst rejoice with me, with whom I too
Rejoiced, through early youth before the winds . . .
Oh! Soul of Nature! that dost overflow
With passion and with life . . . !¹⁷

At times Wordsworth's personification of external nature merges with, or is expressed in a way that suggests, belief in Mother Earth, the earth goddess Hertha, or the *anima mundi*: "Listening to notes that are The ghostly language of the ancient earth"; "the antiquated Earth Beat like the heart of Man"; "Love . . . is stealing, From earth to man, from man to earth"; "The human Soul of universal earth."¹⁸

When, however, the personifying tendency is directed not to external nature as a whole but to individual natural objects or to places, Wordsworth often writes as if he thought of the "Soul of Nature" as localized in a subsidiary soul. Such is the impression made by the lines,

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
And on the earth! Ye Visions of the hills!
And Souls of lonely places! can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
Such ministry.

(i. 464-8)

Indeed, Wordsworth's frequent and unusual use of the term "presence" gives one pause. We have seen that he speaks of the child's sense of immortality as a Presence, Beauty as "a living Presence," and the Wanderer as perceiving "the presence and the power Of greatness." He also mentions "presences of God's mysterious power," standing "in Nature's presence" or "in presence . . . Of that magnificent region," living "in

Your presence often have I felt
In darkness and the stormy night.¹⁹

Oh! what a joy it were . . . To . . .
Be as a presence or a motion—one
Among the many there . . .
An equal among mightiest energies.²⁰

I believe
That there are Spirits which, when they would form
A favored being . . .
seeking him
With gentle visitations, quiet Powers!
Retired and seldom recognized, yet kind
And to the very meanest not unknown.
With me though rarely in my boyish days
They communed; others too there are who use . . .
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable, and of their school was I.
They guided me. (V variant of i. A 351-72)

A little earlier in this same manuscript V, Wordsworth invokes

"Gentle Powers Who give us happiness and call it peace," and a little later he exclaims:

Ah not in vain, ye Beings of the hills,
And ye that walk the woods and open heaths
By moon or starlight, thus from my first dawn
Of childhood, did ye love to intertwine
The passions that build up our human Soul,
. . . with high objects, with eternal things.²¹

Some fifty lines further on he returns to the same theme:

Ye Powers of earth, ye genii of the Springs
And ye that have your voices in the clouds
And ye that are familiars of the Lakes
And standing pools, Ah, not for trivial ends . . .
Did ye with such assiduous love pursue
Your favourite.²²

Apparently "Nutting" was originally conceived as an illustration of the guidance of these friendly Powers, for when Dorothy sent it to Coleridge (December, 1798, or January, 1799) with the comment, "it is the conclusion of a poem of which the beginning is not written," the first lines were:

Among the autumnal woods, a figure quaint,
Equipped with wallet and with crooked stick
They led me, and I followed in their steps.

Who "they" are is made clear six lines further on: "They led me far, Those guardian spirits."

For utterances like these there is but one explanation: animism, the belief in spiritual beings who, like the dryads and nymphs of classical mythology, are associated with certain places, together with the belief in the possession of individual consciousness by each animate and perhaps each inanimate object. Such beliefs are universal and potent among primitive peoples; from them spring the gods of the various mythologies and many of the superstitions, the dim fears, and unrecognized credulities of civilized man. Wordsworth is unusual in avowing them and in the strength with which—owing to the vividness of his imagination and to his early life in a wild, mountainous country—he held them. The boldness of his first

avowals was, however, soon checked; for the most striking assertions of his animism are found only in the earliest manuscripts of "Nutting" and *The Prelude*, but not in the published texts or in the 1805 manuscripts of *The Prelude*. Yet the omission cannot indicate any change in the poet's belief, since a passage written later, perhaps much later, than 1804²³ contains a clear affirmation of the same faith:

And doubt ye that these solitudes are paced
By tutelary Powers more safely versed
In weal and woe than aught that fabling Greece
Invented, Spirits gentle and benign
Who now perhaps from yon reposing cloud
Look down.

Furthermore, the final text of *The Prelude* has the lines,

But images of danger and distress,
Man suffering among awful Powers and Forms;
Of this I heard, and saw enough to make
Imagination restless. (viii. 164-7)

To be sure, the invocation in Book I, "Ye Powers of earth, ye genii of the Springs . . .," is removed, but the passage substituted for it, although too vague to attract attention, is not such as one who had renounced animism would have written.²⁴ There are also the lines which remained unchanged through all editions of the *Descriptive Sketches*:

And sure there is a secret Power that reigns
Here, where no trace of man the spot profanes; (346-7)

and the well-known conclusion to "Nutting," which, published in 1800, was likewise never changed:

I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky.—
Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods.

Then too, about 1825, in the "Address to Kilchurn Castle." Wordsworth exclaimed:

Oh! there is life that breathes not; Powers there are
 That touch each other to the quick in modes
 Which the gross world no sense hath to perceive,
 No soul to dream of.

Ten years later, when he was nearly seventy, he reaffirmed the belief expressed in these lines by prefixing them to the seventh canto of *The White Doe of Rylstone*. Doubtless the consciousness of such Presences and Powers was with Wordsworth less frequently and less vividly in his later years but there is no reason to suppose that his instinctive faith in their existence completely disappeared. It is in accord with his mysticism and with other beliefs which, so far as we know, he never renounced: the ministry of nature, of fear, of solitude, and of lonely places. He was not wont to distrust the intuitions of his youth.

In his illuminating study of Wordsworth's animism and cognate ideas, Mr. M. M. Rader seeks to prove that Wordsworth may have derived these conceptions from Coleridge, from books of travel, from Plato and the Neo-Platonists, or from Tucker's *Light of Nature*.²⁵ Unquestionably he was influenced by Coleridge's insistence on the "unity of all,"²⁶ and undoubtedly Coleridge expresses at times animistic ideas that are close to Wordsworth's, but with Coleridge such thoughts are speculations or poetic fancies, never vital, instinctive beliefs. Here as elsewhere the formulation and development of the idea may be influenced by Coleridge but the original feeling and the conception as well as the later vitality came from Wordsworth's own experience. In this matter at least it is likely that Wordsworth contributed far more than he received, since there is every reason to believe that his animistic feelings were strongly developed before 1795, when he met Coleridge. The picture he gives of his boyhood, not only in *The Prelude* but in "Nutting" and in other short pieces, is markedly animistic; and he assures us that while at Hawkshead and again during his first year at Cambridge he "saw one life" "in all things," and "gave a moral life" to "every natural form, rock, fruit or flower."²⁷ But any attempts to seek a literary source for Wordsworth's animism or to trace it to influences exerted on him after his return from France involve a fundamental mis-

conception. It is as if one should attribute his mystic experiences to the reading of Plotinus or his love of nature to the reading of Thomson. Such things he did not learn from books, and, presumably, not to any appreciable extent from persons. They grew up during his pagan but religious boyhood in consequence of his unusual temperament, his unusual freedom, and his unusual surroundings. His animism, more deep-seated than any reasoned conviction, was a reversion to primitive ways of thinking, which developed he knew not how or when. It was never formulated or closely scrutinized. As there is no evidence that he ever discussed it and as the most striking expressions of it were removed in the revision of *The Prelude*, he seems to have been reserved about his belief and possibly half-ashamed of it. If questioned, he would presumably have taken the same apologetic, evasive attitude towards it that he manifested in the Fenwick note to the Immortality Ode towards pre-existence, in which at times he certainly believed. For he held that, like pre-existence, animism was a doctrine not essential to the love of nature or the life of the spirit. Dorothy seems to have been untouched by it and Coleridge to have speculated about it rather than felt it. As with some of his other most vital beliefs it was unshared—

The prime and vital principle is thine
In the recesses of thy nature, far
From any reach of outward fellowship.²⁸

When we are confronted with such assertions as Wordsworth's "I believe that there are spirits," most of us are inclined to exclaim: "But did he *really* believe anything of the kind?" And because we do not understand how he could have conceived of nature as animated by Spirits having independent life and power of action we conclude that he did not, and straightway forget the matter. But, as Professor Bradley has remarked, "The road into Wordsworth's mind must be through his strangeness and his paradoxes, and not round them."²⁹ The answer to our question turns largely on our definition of "believe." If we mean by it, "Did he sometimes question the objective reality of such Beings, and of the enjoy-

ment the flower takes in the air it breathes?" the answer is unquestionably "Yes." For he characterized the poet as "a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, . . . delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them." Still more explicitly he spoke of "the thinking mind" as "infusing by meditation into the objects with which it converses an intellectual life." Furthermore, he confessed that he may have seen "in all things . . . one life" because "to unorganic natures I transferr'd My own enjoyments."⁸⁰ In some lines added to *The Excursion*, presumably about 1810, the Wanderer remarks, "The Poets . . . call the groves . . . the hills and streams to mourn" and then adds the significant comment:

nor idly; for they speak,
In these their invocations, with a voice
Obedient to the strong creative power
Of human passion.⁸¹

That is, man is justified in thinking of nature as sympathizing with his griefs although such sympathy has no existence apart from man's own creative powers. It is not surprising, therefore, that Wordsworth was tolerant of animism even when it rested on what he regarded as falsehood:

Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

Yet rather would I instantly decline
To the traditionary sympathies
Of a most rustic ignorance, and take
A fearful apprehension from the owl . . .
To this would rather bend than see and hear
The repetitions wearisome of sense,
Where soul is dead, and feeling hath no place.⁸²

So he looked back wistfully at the delusions of former times

when not by *laws* inanimate,
As men believed, the waters were impelled,
The air controlled, the stars their courses held;
But element and orb on *acts* did wait
Of *Powers* endued with visible form, instinct
With will, and to their work by passion linked.⁸⁸

A person so richly imaginative as Wordsworth, who tended to endow concepts and forces with personality, who through years of close intimacy had developed a passionate love of nature, was almost certain to feel a conscious life in the flowers and trees, the stars and mountains. Indeed, with most of us such survivals of primitive feelings and ways of thought are far more common than is generally realized. The belief in charms, lucky days, and unlucky numbers, the half-jocular allusions to the total depravity of inanimate things are but a few of these vestigial remains. We think of a boat we love as a kind of person, likewise a mountain that we love or fear; and evolution is conceived by most persons not as a law but as the action of a conscious personality. Inanimate objects, too, when we encounter them in forms so unusual and powerful as to inspire terror—a cyclone, whirlpool, a swirling river overflowing its banks, the ocean in a tempest, a thunder storm,—seem to us savage beasts reaching out to devour whatever they can grasp. And is there anyone who really cares for nature who does not feel on a particularly lovely day that there is joy and peace not only in his heart but in the hills and fields about him,—“in the heart of Nature”?

But Wordsworth goes further than this. The ultimate, dim basis of his animism and of much of his religion and his poetry is the feeling of mystery and awe with which primitive man regards the earth, the sun, and the heavens, and the natural forces at work in them. Apparently the animistic survivals that are most common among civilized people today are connected with storms and other exhibitions of dangerous power—that is with fear. Now we have seen that Wordsworth believed strongly in the ministry of fear and that one of the most striking illustrations he gives of this ministry was originally introduced with the words: “I believe That there are Spirits . . . who use . . . Severer interventions. . . . They guided me.”

old Helvellyn, conscious of the stir
Which animates this day their calm abode.

With Wordsworth such expressions were more than figurative or "poetic." He was so vividly aware of life and feeling in all things that a breeze might well appear to be "half-conscious of the joy it brings," and a "roar of waters" might seem to be "felt by the starry heavens"; he might easily find

a blessing in the air,
Which seems a sense of joy to yield
To the bare trees, and mountains bare.⁸⁷

He addressed a brook with the words:

I would not do
Like Grecian Artists, give thee human cheeks,
Channels for tears; no Naiad shouldst thou be,—
Have neither limbs, feet, feathers, joints, nor hairs.

Yet he did think of the stream as a kind of disembodied spirit having personality, for he added:

It seems the Eternal Soul is clothed in thee
With purer robes than those of flesh and blood,
And hath bestowed on thee a safer good;
Unwearied joy, and life without its cares.
("Brook! whose society," 7-14)

It was because he tended to think that woods, lonely places, and individual natural objects are not only permeated by the One Spirit, but that each has feelings, purposes, and powers through which it cooperates with the One—it was for this reason that Wordsworth believed the external world to be exquisitely fitted to the mind of man.⁸⁸ This explained for him

that universal power
And fitness in the latent qualities
And essences of things, by which the mind
Is moved with feelings of delight; (ii. 324-7)

thus it was that

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran.

It would seem, then, that the "faith that every flower Enjoys
the air it breathes," the feeling that

The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare,⁸⁹

is, in part, a vivid expression of an unusually vivid awareness of the pervading Spirit. The belief, too, in Beings, Powers, and Guardian Spirits, although to a considerable extent a reversion to primitive ways of thinking, seems to be in some degree an instinctive localization of the pervading Spirit, or an individualization of it into distinct personalities on the part of a mind deeply conscious of that Spirit and of its protecting love.

NOTES

¹ xiii. 133-6; Immortality Ode, 191-2 (my italics); "Lines written in Early Spring," 19-20.

² "Dogmatic Teachers," 7; *Excursion*, vi. 392-6. See also footnote 13 this chapter. Instances of the conventional, classical use of "Genius" and "Genii" will be found in the Wordsworth *Concordance*. For other fanciful or merely figurative and literary references to Spirits, Powers, and the like see "Gordale" ("At early dawn"), 6-10; *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, II. xviii. 1-6; *Descriptive Sketches* (1793), 371-4, 418-23; "Where are they now," 32-42; "Devotional Incitements," 1-2; "What He—who," 37-43; "Clouds, lingering yet," 11-14; *Recluse*, I. i. 31-6. The sylphs and nymphs of Erasmus Darwin's poetry may have influenced some of these passages.

³ No weight can be attached to the capitalization of "Spirits," "Beings," or "Powers" in the later manuscripts, the 1850 edition of *The Prelude*, or the published texts of other poems, for in them any important nouns may be, or may not be, capitalized. In MS JJ these words as well as common nouns are not capitalized; but in MS V and the A variant of viii. A 55-61—that is, in the manuscripts of the most strikingly animistic passages Wordsworth wrote—these words are capitalized and apparently very few common nouns are. In these instances alone, therefore, the use of capitals may be significant.

⁴ viii. 215-18; "Hail, Twilight" (contrast "Evening of Extraordinary Splendour," 33-6); *Prelude*, vi. 592-6; xiv. 112-13; *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, I. ii. 3-5; *Prelude*, v. 213-21. Since the "power that rolls About, below, above" in "To my Sister" (33-4) is love (see 21-3) there can be no question of animism.

⁵ xiii. 309-12; viii. 256-60; "Musings near Aquapendente," 280-8. See also *Recluse*, I. i. 318-40.

⁶ For example, the early draft of "Nutting" (de S., 591); A² variant of i. A 29-32; xiv. 64-5; "How clear, how keen," 10-11; "On the Departure of Sir Walter Scott," 4-5.

⁷ For example, *Descriptive Sketches* (1793), 418-23; "The stars are mansions," 1-3; "Oh what a Wreck," 7-8; *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, I. xviii. 4-5; *Excursion*, iv. 91-3; "Evening of Extraordinary Splendour," 9-15; "Who fancied," 15-18; "Evening of Extraordinary Splendour," 47-8; "When Philoctetes," 9-10; *Recluse*, I. i. 299-300.

⁸ viii. 376-406 offers a good illustration of the pathetic fallacy as distinguished from animism. There are many others in *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*.

⁹ xiii. 290-3 (cf. ii. 254, "this active universe"); *Excursion*, ix. 1-9; "A Poet!—He hath put," 9-14. As Charles Lamb observed: "To a mind constituted like that of Mr. Wordsworth, the stream, the torrent, and the stirring leaf—seem not merely to suggest associations of deity, but to be a kind of speaking communication with it. . . . In his poetry nothing in Nature is dead" (Review of *The Excursion, Works*, ed. Lucas, I, 163).

¹⁰ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (Oxf. W., p. 937).

¹¹ *The Diary of Dr. John William Polidori*, ed. W. M. Rossetti, 1911, p. 128. Another instance of the kind is mentioned in his wife's note to *Speculations on Metaphysics*, iv.

¹² Bonamy Price's report of a conversation with Wordsworth, Knight, viii, 202.

¹³ i. 315-17; *Immortality Ode*, 118-20; *Recluse*, "Prospectus," 42-7. In "There is a little," 13-14, the recollection of a day spent beside a stream is referred to in the words, "The immortal Spirit of one happy day Lingers beside that Rill" and in "The Pass of Kirkstone," 29-36, care and guilt are said to be subdued by a "Genius" that dwells mid the vales and plains; but such personification is merely verbal.

¹⁴ *Recluse*, i. i. 274-5; *Prelude*, xii. 95-100.

¹⁵ *Peter Bell*, 736-85, 821-30, 916-20. Mr. M. Rader, on the contrary, holds "that the spirits dwell in nature, even though they are called 'Spirits of the Mind,'" and that "the poem was apparently designed to celebrate the power over the mind of the animistic forces that dwell in nature" (*Presiding Ideas in Wordsworth's Poetry*, Univ. of Washington Pub. in Lang. and Lit., viii, no. 2, Seattle, Washington, 1931, pp. 203, 179).

¹⁶ "Oh what a Wreck," 2-3. So *The Prelude*: "In the unreasoning progress of the world A wiser spirit is at work" (v. 359-61) and "A gracious spirit o'er this earth presides" (v. 491-5).

¹⁷ xii. A 138-47. The final text (93-104) adds a line of religious orthodoxy and changes the final line to "With an impassioned life." Wordsworth's pantheism is discussed in Chapter ix, where these lines and those quoted immediately below are considered.

¹⁸ ii. 306-9; "Jones! as from Calais," 5-7; "To my Sister," 21-4; *Recluse*, "Prospectus," 84. In "Hart-Leap Well," 163-8, he goes far beyond personification and speaks of Nature as if she were the immanent God or at least a divine Being.

¹⁹ ix. 234 (in A, "Familiar presences of awful Power"); xii. 206; vi. 738-9; xiii. 242-5; *Peter Bell*, 776-7.

²⁰ xiv. 164-5; *Recluse*, "Prospectus," 6-8; *Excursion*, iv. 226, 508-32. Cf. also de S., 602, lines 60-1, "Such presence [the presence of imaginative power] is acknowledged, when we trace The history of Columbus."

²¹ V variants of i. A 318-19 and i. A 428-36. Both passages are in JJ.

²² V variant of i. A 490-2. JJ is much the same.

²³ Variant in A of viii. A 55-61. This is later than 1804 since it is not in MS Y (de S., 549) and, as it is not in C, may have been added after 1819 (de S., xviii).

²⁴ The two passages are quoted on pp. 74, 76 above.

²⁵ *Presiding Ideas in Wordsworth's Poetry*, chapter v and Appendix B. I am indebted to Mr. Rader for calling my attention to several of the quotations I have used.

²⁶ ii. 221 n.

²⁷ ii. A 429-30; iii. A 121-31.

²⁸ xiv. 215-17. W. H. Hudson writes, "I never spoke of these [animistic] feelings to others, not even to my mother, notwithstanding that she was always in perfect sympathy with me" (*Far Away and Long Ago*, chapter xvii).

²⁹ *Oxford Lectures*, p. 101.

³⁰ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, p. 937); Letter to *The Friend* (Grosart, i, 320); *Prelude*, ii. A 429-30, A 410-11 (so iii. 128-9). The last two lines are the same in the final text except that "I" is changed to "were"; as the passage is found in MS V it is not later than 1800. Similarly *The Excursion*, i. 153-62 suggests that it may be because he was "by creative feeling overborne" that the Wanderer "traced an ebbing and a flowing mind" in all nature; cf. also *Excursion*, iv. 833. *Biographia Literaria*, chapter xv (ed. Shawcross, ii, 16), has the comment, "Images . . . become proofs of original genius . . . when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit."

³¹ *Excursion*, i. 475-81. The passage is not in the draft of "The Ruined

Cottage" which Dorothy sent Mary Hutchinson in March, 1798. *The Excursion* was published July, 1814, but the greater part of it was written between May, 1808, and May, 1811. Only four lines beyond the last of those quoted above, the Wanderer describes himself as eyeing the waters of Margaret's spring

till we seemed to feel
One sadness, they and I. For them a bond
Of brotherhood is broken.

²² "The world is too much with us," 9-14; *Excursion*, iv. 613-21. In *Excursion*, iv. 829-37 the Wanderer says that the shepherd

(Take from him what you will upon the score
Of ignorance or illusion) lives and breathes
For noble purposes of mind: his heart
Beats to the heroic song of ancient days;
His eye distinguishes, his soul creates.
And those illusions, which excite the scorn
Or move the pity of unthinking minds,
Are they not mainly outward ministers
Of inward conscience?

Cf. Wordsworth's remark to W. R. Hamilton (quoted on p. 147 below) that "he would much prefer being a superstitious old woman" to having his mind engrossed with "the naked knowledge of facts . . . to the utter exclusion of Imagination."

²³ "Bold words affirmed," 9-14; the italics are Wordsworth's. Note the next sonnet in the series, "Desire we past illusions."

²⁴ JJ and V variants of i. A 351-72, A 428-33; i. A 439-40; JJ and V variants of i. A 490-2; i. A 497-8.

²⁵ ii. 386-409 (A adds "in all things now I saw one life"); iii. 130-3 (the same in A). Cf. "The Old Cumberland Beggar," 77-9: "A spirit and pulse of good, A life and soul, to every mode of being Inseparably linked." As a boy the Wanderer traced "in caves . . . And 'mid the hollow depths of naked crags . . . an ebbing and a flowing mind"; and later he asserted his belief in

Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
No chasm, no solitude; from link to link
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.

(*Excursion*, i. 154-61; ix. 13-15)

²⁶ Clement Carlyon, *Early Years and Late Reflections*, 1856, i, 193. Coleridge discoursed to Wordsworth of Spinoza in 1797-8, when the two roamed the Quantock Hills, and a little later in Germany, so Carlyon tells us, he frequently reverted to the same topic. Accordingly, it might be maintained that Wordsworth derived these conceptions from Spinoza by way of Coleridge, were it not for *Prelude*, ii. 386-418, which declares that they were strongly felt when "my seventeenth year was come." There is little likelihood that in so remote a village as Hawkshead a boy who delighted in out-door life would know much of Spinozism or neo-Platonism, but with the idea of the presence of God in the external world Wordsworth was familiar from the works of Shaftesbury, Thomson, Akenside, and other popular eighteenth-century writers.

²⁷ "Loud is the Vale," 7-8; *Excursion*, iv. 483-5; "It is a beauteous evening," 5-8; "The world is too much with us," 5; *Prelude*, viii. 63-9; i. 1-3; xiv. 56-62; "To my Sister," 5-7.

²⁸ *Recluse*, "Prospectus," 66-8.

²⁹ "Lines written in Early Spring," 5-6, 11-12; Immortality Ode, 12-13.

CHAPTER VI

NATURE

He [Saint Bernard] was accustomed to say that all the literature which he knew . . . he had learned in the woods and fields, and not with the aid of human instruction . . . and that he had never had any other masters than the oaks and beeches. I like to cite this, because . . . I should wish to say—and unless I deceive myself I can say it truthfully—that the same thing was true in my case.

Petrarch, *The Life of Solitude*,

translated by Jacob Zeitlin, II, chapter 14

I assert for My Self that I do not behold the outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action. . . . I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it & not with it.

Blake, *A Vision of the Last Judgment*

His daily teachers had been woods and rills.

Wordsworth, "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle"

His [Wordsworth's] undisputed sovereignty . . . lies in his extraordinary faculty of giving utterance to some of the most elementary, and, at the same time, obscure, sensations of man confronted by natural phenomena.

Legouis, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, XI

I think too much town life has done us in; when we don't live (to some extent at all events) with Nature we forget how to live at all.


John Galsworthy, letter of March 13, 1926,

The Colophon, XIX, 1934

WORDSWORTH'S conception of nature and its ministry to the human spirit arose from boyhood experience. What is deepest and most vital in it as in his poetry was derived, not from books or from Coleridge, but from the fields, the waters, and the mountains about Hawkshead. Here, at least, the child was father of the man. This early experience took on added

significance in the light of later experience: the eager days and troubled nights of the French Revolution, the months of torment and despair that followed upon its later phases as well as upon the attempt to find in pure intellect a guide to life. The darkness of the years in "the weary labyrinth" made the sunshine at Hawkshead seem brighter, and the complacent, narrow speciousness of rationalism threw into relief the spontaneous wisdom of a life close to nature. Likewise the lonely months at Goslar with their separation from moors, mountains, and hollow vales contrasted with the joyous days of wandering in the open at Alfoxden and Racedown.

Much of the philosophical part of Wordsworth's poetry is an attempt to find a rational justification for the importance which his feelings and his experience told him that nature held for man. Unconvincing as much of this justification may be, it sprang from an effort to explain what was real and deeply felt. The happiest years of his life had been spent near the mountains and heaths; his most exalted experiences, his periods of deepest insight were closely connected with them; separation from them had meant error, doubt, despair; and renewed association with them had led him back


 To those sweet counsels between head and heart
 Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught with peace.
 (xi. 352-4)

What wonder, then, if he felt that anything so central in his life as nature must mean more than esthetic delight, good health, good spirits, and vague uplift?

In his youth Wordsworth did not theorize about nature; he "felt, and nothing else."¹ This state of almost thoughtless delight in the external world lasted through his stay in France and nearly until his recovery from despair and his meeting with Coleridge.² Thus his first quarter century of nature worship was virtually undisturbed by the meddling intellect. Of course he made some interpretations of what he saw and felt: he was conscious of Spirits who walk the woods and open heaths, as well as of one life in all things, but these beliefs were instinctive, not reasoned. Hence, although he had long known the delight of sense impressions, he had probably thought little of

their value until he had struggled out of the slough of despond into which reason had led him. Then he saw that, Antaeus like, man preserves his strength only so long as he keeps his feet on the earth, that vivid life of the senses, close contact with fields and streams, is necessary if one's reasonings are not to go astray. It was in 1798, shortly after his recovery, that he commended "a wise passiveness" to sense impressions and wrote the stanza in praise of "one impulse from a vernal wood." This stanza, it will be recalled, is preceded by one that mentions as nature's gifts

Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness,

and is followed by one that asserts

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things.

The entire poem, "The Tables Turned," is therefore devoted to the contrast between the wisdom derived through the senses and the mis-shapen conceptions furnished by the intellect. It is an expression of his reaction from the abstract reasoning of Godwin and the philosophers of the French Revolution, men whose thinking was vitiated by their loss of contact with living nature. The same reaction appears in his new appreciation of the worth and dignity of humble man. The shepherd whom he now began to admire was "no composition of the brain, but . . . the man whom we behold With our own eyes."²⁴

The attention given to "hallowed and pure motions of the sense" in Wordsworth's poetry may easily be overlooked despite his assertion that "infant sensibility" is the "great birthright of our being" and despite his devoting the first books of *The Prelude* to showing how in his own case it was "augmented and sustained."²⁵ He also affirmed that,

having been brought up in such a grand
And lovely region, I had forms distinct
To steady me; . . .
At all times had a real solid world
Of images about me; did not pine
As one in cities bred might do.

(viii. A 596-605)

His vivid delight in physical sensations, his emphasis on them as distinguished from the feelings they arouse, is shown in the way he describes them:

Thus long I lay
 Chear'd by the genial pillow of the earth
 Beneath my head, sooth'd by a sense of touch
 From the warm ground, that balanced me. (i. A 87-90)

My body from the stillness drinking in
 A restoration like the calm of sleep. (iv. A 386-7)

Drinking in a pure
 Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths
 Of curling mist. (i. 563-5)

With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
 Blow through my ear! (i. 337-8)

The calm
 And dead still water lay upon my mind
 Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
 Never before so beautiful, sank down
 Into my heart, and held me like a dream! (ii. 170-4)

A gentle shock of mild surprise
 Has carried far into his heart the voice
 Of mountain torrents. (v. 382-4)

Deep feelings had impressed
 So vividly great objects that they lay
 Upon his mind like substances. (*Excursion*, i. 136-8)

It is noteworthy that when he speaks of what his first visit to the Wye had meant to him in the five succeeding years, he mentions not ideas, not the memory of the scene, but "sensations . . . Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart." So in his coming on the place of the gibbet and in his waiting for the horses to take him home, it was to definite sights and sounds—"the one blasted tree, And the bleak music from that old stone wall"—that he "oft repaired, and thence would drink, As at a fountain."⁴ So it was with the daffodils: the wealth they brought him was not edification or insight into the life of things but the memory of a vivid sense impression; they flashed upon his inner eye. Likewise in his address "To a Highland Girl," it is the visual scene that he hopes to recall:

For I, methinks, till I grow old,
 As fair before me shall behold,
 As I do now, the cabin small,
 The lake, the bay, the waterfall;
 And Thee, the Spirit of them all! (74-8)

Of his boyhood's pleasures he writes:

The scenes which were a witness of that joy
 Remained in their substantial lineaments
 Depicted on the brain, and to the eye
 Were visible, a daily sight. (i. 599-602)

These last quotations indicate that Wordsworth's memory of sense impressions was unusually vivid and often produced mental and even physical effects as great as those called forth by the original experience, perhaps at times even greater.⁵ A poet, he said, is "possessed of more than usual organic sensibility"; this was certainly true in his own case for, according to De Quincey, his "intellectual passions . . . rested upon a basis of preternatural animal sensibility diffused through *all* the animal passions (or appetites)." ⁶ Coleridge records an occasion when, as he was discoursing (apparently on the Divine Wisdom as manifested in the universe), he was "overset" by Wordsworth's tendency "always to look at the superficies of objects for the purpose of taking delight in their beauty, and sympathy with their real or imagined life." ⁷ But to Wordsworth, deepest insight had come, not from speculations on the Divine Wisdom, but from memorable experiences connected with the external world; it was closely related to the senses and to meditation on what the senses gave. In Professor Garrod's words, Wordsworth had found that "reason and its complexity obstructs the pure and simple work of the senses," whereas in his great moments with nature—

the familiar took on a guise of unfamiliarity . . . the mind or senses are for the time set free from custom . . . it is when custom and matter-of-fact habit drop from us, that we have our truest vision of the world. . . . Wordsworth starts, then, from the position not only that Nature is good, but that it is from the natural goodness of the senses, operating simply and directly, that we derive 'the fountain-light of all our day.' (p. 99)

Professor Garrod continues:

The mysticism of other men consists commonly in their effort to escape from the senses, the mysticism of Wordsworth is grounded and rooted, actually, *in* the senses. The natural world speaks, not to the intellect, but to . . . our senses. It is only when we allow reason, or intellect, to confuse the clear and sweet report of the senses that we cease to see visions, and from being poets become mere men again. (p. 105)

Now, curiously enough, this confusion of the sense impressions by reason is, according to another contemporary critic, precisely what we find in Wordsworth. Mr. Aldous Huxley writes:

The Wordsworthian adoration of Nature has two principal defects . . . it is only possible in a country where Nature has been nearly or quite enslaved to man. [In 1807, Nature in the lake district was by no means enslaved to man.] The second is that it is only possible for those who are prepared to falsify their immediate intuitions of Nature. . . . Normally what he [Wordsworth] does is to pump the dangerous Unknown out of Nature [The dangerous and the Unknown in Nature, had for Wordsworth unusual attraction.]⁸ and refill the emptied forms of hills . . . with something more reassuringly familiar—with humanity, with Anglicanism. [Mr. Huxley must be thinking of the later Wordsworth; there is no Anglicanism in the poetry of 1797-1807.] He will not admit that a yellow primrose is simply a yellow primrose—beautiful, but essentially strange, having its own alien life apart. [For most persons who have known and loved the primrose from childhood the realization that it is "essentially strange, having its own alien life apart" is not an "immediate intuition of Nature" but a correction by reason of what is instinctively felt.] . . . Instead of listening humbly to what the teacher [Nature] says, he shuts his ears and himself dictates the lesson he desires to hear. [I know of no basis for this assertion so far as the early Wordsworth is concerned. It is not borne out by *The Prelude*.] . . . He used his intellect to distort his exquisitely acute and subtle intuitions of the world, to explain away their often disquieting strangeness, to simplify them into a comfortable metaphysical unreality. [Rather, his imagination transformed his sense impressions giving them significance for man, relating them to human life.] To conceive of the Wordsworth of *The Prelude* as avoiding strangeness and as achieving comfort by means of the intellect is a fundamental misapprehension.]⁹

Mr. Huxley here raises a question which must be met more

directly than it hitherto has been. Wordsworth believed in the supreme value of the senses but did not picture the external world or human life as they appear to the senses; he did not believe that art should do so. For the senses, although they yield delight and are a valuable steadying force and corrective to reason, do not themselves yield insight. They furnish the indispensable materials for obtaining it. Insight is gained only when sense impressions have been transformed by the imagination, and accordingly art deals with impressions that have been thus transformed. Now imagination not only influences the reason and the general outlook on life, but is influenced by them. The imagination of an orthodox or conservative person will produce something very different in meaning or point of view from that of a radical. Wordsworth might have approached nature, as in his later years he often did, with certain intellectual or ethical preconceptions and have found illustration or confirmation of these in the mighty world of eye and ear. Although this process is likely to dull the imagination it does not always do so and great poetry may result, but in that case the poet has learned nothing from nature. Wordsworth's letters and prefaces as well as his verse—a large body of material and one that bears a strong imprint of honesty and of facing reality—not only assert but leave the impression that he did not approach the countryside in this way. Until he was about twenty-seven the meddling intellect did not concern itself about his enjoyment of nature; he had no theories; he did not hear the music of humanity in fields and groves. Thereafter, when, yielding up moral questions in despair, he turned to nature it was to escape analytical reason, which seemed "of least use Where wanted most," and to recapture the thoughtless enjoyment of boyhood. As he found himself he began to ask, stimulated by the philosophic mind of Coleridge, what was this nature which had brought him peace and joy and insight? what was its relation to God and man? what part did the imagination play in this relationship? how is the very great value of the external world to be reconciled with the transcendent importance of the human mind? The answers to these questions were not so much thought out as lived out. Like the questions themselves they arose from communion with

nature and intercourse with men who toiled in the fields. Of one of his ideas he wrote:

The external universe,
By striking upon what is found within,
Had given me this conception. (viii. A 765-7)

Such conceptions were tested and corrected by daily life in the open and by experience in composing poetry—which likewise was done in the open. They were developed and modified in close contact with trees and running brooks until about 1810, when they hardened. One may well disagree with them but one cannot maintain that they are *a priori* opinions read into rather than derived from nature. They represent what the poet saw and felt, there and in his own life. "Tintern Abbey," for example, gives the impression that its author is describing an experience, not propounding a theory, and his poetry as a whole presents a "fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed."¹⁰ Wordsworth's intellect did not distort his intuitions of the world but his imagination, developed by long association with nature and by observation of life, modified and transformed them, giving them unity and revealing their beauty and their significance for man.

In themselves, as Wordsworth saw, sense impressions have none of these things. Verse presents them "with glory not their own." "The mind is lord and master—outward sense The obedient servant of her will"; "an auxiliar light Came from my mind, which on the setting sun Bestowed new splendour"; "visible form Is to the pleasure of the human mind What passion makes it."¹¹ As one climbs a mountain one wonders

that Man could e'er be tied,
In anxious bondage, to such nice array
And formal fellowship of petty things!
—Oh! 'tis the *heart* that magnifies this life,
Making a truth and beauty of her own.
("Enough of climbing," 9-13)

Yea, what were mighty Nature's self?
Her features, could they win us,

Unhelped by the poetic voice
That hourly speaks within us?

("Yarrow Revisited," 85-8)

Of his poem, *The White Doe of Rylstone*, Wordsworth wrote:

Throughout, objects (the Banner, for instance) derive their influence not from properties inherent in them, not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects. Thus the Poetry . . . proceeds whence it ought to do, from the soul of Man, communicating its creative energies to the images of the external world.¹²

So *The Prelude*, which deals chiefly with nature, is a study of the imagination, of the means by which nature is made to serve the spiritual needs of man. For although "long A worshipper of Nature" Wordsworth did not worship her primarily for her own sake but for her ministry. As if to leave no doubt on this point he declared in the noble lines prefixed to *The Excursion* that the mind of man was his haunt and the main region of his song, and that of all existent or imaginary things it filled him with greatest awe. His other long poem, his greatest work, he concluded with the words:

The mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things . . .
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of quality and fabric more divine.

That it was nature's ministry rather than nature's self which Wordsworth chiefly valued is seen in the somewhat surprising circumstance that, deep and rapturous as was his delight in the external world, it was less purely esthetic, less concerned with what is usually thought of as beauty, than is the case with most persons who care for the country. Like all true lovers he found his mistress beautiful but loved her chiefly for her other qualities. Many of his most impressive experiences took place in bad weather, when the loveliness of the countryside was lost but its loneliness, fearsomeness, and mystery were increased.¹³ He cherished the memory of a walk around Esthwaite during

his first university vacation although it was in an "hour not winning or serene, For cold and raw the air was, and untuned," and in speaking of the richness of his fellowship with nature he mentions first of all

November days,
When vapours rolling down the valley made
A lonely scene more lonesome. (i. 416-18)

Even the sounds on which he dwells were preferred, as M. Legouis has remarked,

not on account of their sweetness or their melody, but because of their meaning, their striking peculiarity, the emblem he discerned in them, or the spiritual state which they occasioned. The cuckoo's singular note or the murmur of the turtle dove were dearer and more inspiring to him than the trills of the nightingale. The raven's croak and the hoot of the owl are, of all nature's voices, those of which he has best felt and reproduced the effects. (trs., p. 461)

In the "spots of time" the scenes that were stamped upon his memory and affections were not attractive, and there is no reason to suppose that beauty played any part in making memorable the occasions when he robbed the trap of another boy, or hunted birds' eggs, or lost his way crossing the Alps, or tried to sleep in the woods beyond Gravedona, or fled the mountain that "like a living thing strode after" him. Even in the great description of passing the Alpine defile¹⁴ it is the awe-inspiring but rather unpleasant features of the scene that are emphasized: "This gloomy strait . . . woods decaying . . . Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn . . . rocks that muttered . . . Black drizzling crags . . . the sick sight And giddy prospect of the raving stream." Nature's richest ministrations, he tells us, are found "chiefly where appear Most obviously simplicity and power,"¹⁵ not beauty. He sought lonely places not because they were fairest but because only in them could he "cleave to solitude." The *beauty* of the external world had never impressed him more vividly than during the period of dereliction when he was the slave of his eye and "rejoiced To lay the inner faculties asleep."¹⁶

Often when he was conscious of the loveliness about him, as in the skating incident, that of the drowned man's garments, of

the "single tree" at Cambridge, the dedication, the boy of Winander listening to the silence, beauty seems to have been felt as incidental. It was something else that made the scene memorable: a sense of mystery, or of something beyond or more deeply interfused. "The earth And common face of Nature spake . . . Rememberable things."¹⁷ Of one of these occasions he remarks, "The workings of my spirit thence are brought,"¹⁸ and of another that it showed the "power in sound To breathe an elevated mood." "Thence," he exclaims, "did I drink the visionary power."¹⁹ Such "fleeting moods Of shadowy exultation" from which the soul

retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, whereto
With growing faculties she doth aspire (ii. 312-19)

usually came during his intercourse with nature, and therein lay much of the attraction and significance she had for him. If the scenes that gave rise to these moods offered almost nothing to delight the senses, this mattered relatively little.

There were other occasions, and these the most precious, in which nature acted as some elements do in chemical changes, starting a process with which, after the start, they have nothing to do. That is, the experience has its origin in nature but, as it intensifies, the consciousness of nature disappears:

in such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode.
(vi. 599-602)

At the time when he "felt the sentiment of Being spread O'er all" the "song" that all things sang was

Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear,
O'ercome by humblest prelude of that strain,
Forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed. (ii. 415-18)

He liked to walk by night in order that he might enjoy "an elevated mood, by form Or image unprofaned."²⁰ Of one of these walks he wrote:

I look'd not round, nor did the solitude
 Speak to my eye; but it was heard and felt.
 O happy state! what beauteous pictures now
 Rose in harmonious imagery—they rose
 As from some distant region of my soul. (iv. A 390-4)

This potency of nature even when unobserved is the theme of one of the best of his later sonnets:

Most sweet it is with unuplifted eyes
 To pace the ground, if path be there or none,
 While a fair region round the traveller lies
 Which he forbears again to look upon;
 Pleased rather with some soft ideal scene,
 The work of Fancy, or some happy tone
 Of meditation, slipping in between
 The beauty coming and the beauty gone.

Often when he sat

Alone upon some jutting eminence,
 At the first gleam of dawn-light . . .
 . . . such a holy calm
 Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes
 Were utterly forgotten. (ii. 343-50)

Similarly, of his first circuit of the lake on his return from Cambridge he says:

I saw but little, and thereat was pleas'd;
 Little did I remember . . . but I had hopes and peace
 And swellings of the spirit, was rapt and soothed.
 (iv. A 150-3)

So in "Tintern Abbey," recollection of the beauteous forms of the Wye Valley had at times induced that serene and blessed mood in which,

the breath of this corporeal frame
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul. (41-6)

Clearly these are the experiences of one who, closely as he might observe the moors, mountains, headlands, and hollow

vales, loved them less for their beauty than for their ministry to the spirit.

Indeed, there was danger, Wordsworth thought, in the purely esthetic approach to nature. Writers of the "picturesque" school, which enjoyed a considerable vogue during his youth, were absorbed in details, analytical, critical, prone to compare one scene with another and to study how the view before them might be improved.²¹ This error of considering nature as a picture rather than as a source of spiritual power, this substitution of the "microscopic view" for "wise passiveness," he had himself fallen into during his rationalistic period; in consequence he had become "insensible" (in A, "less sensible")

to the moods

Of time and season, to the moral power,

The affections and the spirit of the place. (xii. 118-21)

Such relative insensibility to the *ministry* of nature marks his first published works, *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, and will be strongly felt by anyone who compares the account of the Swiss tour in *Descriptive Sketches* with that in *Prelude* VI. Close observation of the external world is to be found in most of Wordsworth's verse but it is the observation of a poet, not of a naturalist. He never kept a diary recording the first appearance of birds and flowers; he could not have written *The Natural History of Selborne*; he would not have been interested in writing it. He held that if descriptive poetry is to be true it must be "at once real and ideal . . . including exact and accurate detail, and yet everywhere subordinating mere detail to the spirit of the whole."²²

On this account he valued the occasions in which Nature herself subordinated the details—times of cloud and mist, twilight, night, and "day[s] Upon the edge of Autumn, fierce with storm."²³ Doubtless he believed it to be at such times that nature contributed most to the development of the imagination, the ministry of fear, and the formation of a lofty conception of man. He recalled with delight days when, "by mists bewildered" suddenly he beheld a shepherd

In size a giant, stalking through thick fog,
His sheep like Greenland bears; or, as he stepped,

Beyond the boundary line of some hill-shadow,
His form hath flashed upon me, glorified
By the deep radiance of the setting sun.²⁴

He had been similarly impressed when he came upon a solitary horse silhouetted against "a clear silver moonlight sky . . . 'all but shape and substance gone.'" ²⁵ He was pleased with a view from a mountain top because

the gross and visible frame of things
Relinquishes its hold upon the sense,
Yea almost on the Mind herself, and seems
All unsubstantialized. (*Excursion*, ix. 63-6)

Here again nature is valued for what she does rather than for what she is, and is valued the more in proportion as she is felt rather than seen, as esthetic appeal is subordinated to imaginative and spiritual ministry.

~~When Wordsworth spoke of the soothing and uplifting influence of nature, of the thoughts too deep for tears which flowers often gave him, he was referring to his own experience and, as many persons have had similar experiences, there is no reason to question his word. But when he contrasts "the mean and vulgar works of man" with the "high objects" and "enduring things" of nature he passes from experience to opinion, and implies that many natural objects are in themselves pure and noble, that they possess an intrinsic excellence not to be found in the products of human effort. He nowhere says just this ²⁶ and he should not have believed it since it contradicts his repeatedly-asserted conviction that the value of objects of the senses is conferred on them by the human mind or heart: ²⁷~~

'Tis the heart that magnifies this life,
Making a truth and beauty of her own;
And moss-grown alleys, circumscribing shades,
And gurgling rills, assist her in the work.
("Enough of climbing toil," 12-15)

This idea is implied in his comparison of the universe to a sea-shell: as the murmurs that are heard when the shell is held

to the ear do not come from the sea or originate in the shell, so, although the universe may impart

Authentic tidings of invisible things;
Of ebb and flow, and ever-during power;
And central peace, subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation, (Excursion, iv. 1143-7)

yet these truths are not in the external world but in the mind of man. Nature's part is that of a midwife who brings them to birth,—the figure is from Coleridge, who puts the matter thus:

Nature, as another *subject* veiled behind the visible *object* without us, solicits the intelligible object hid, and yet struggling beneath the subject within us, and like a helping Lucina, brings it forth for us into distinct consciousness and common light.²⁸

We are all, however, inclined to attribute to persons and things the qualities which they call forth in us, and likewise to confuse physical with corresponding moral excellences. That is, we tend to associate high peaks with high ideals, to think of the moon as tender, the ocean and the stars as free from pettiness, mountains as noble in an ethical as well as an esthetic sense, and life in the country as deriving moral purity from the sunshine, the fresh foliage, the uncontaminated air and streams. This way of thinking would be the more natural to Wordsworth because for him "every natural form . . . Even . . . stones . . . Lay bedded in a quickening soul," because of his belief that "the sovereign Intellect . . . through that bodily Image [external nature] hath diffus'd A soul divine."²⁹ One who conceives of natural objects as thus permeated by a divine spirit easily comes to think of such objects as pure and exalted.

A somewhat similar confusion into which Wordsworth undoubtedly fell is that of not distinguishing between esthetic and moral values. The enjoyment of nature usually, though not always, exerts a refining influence on its possessors, just as the enjoyment of music or of carved jade does. Other things being equal, men who have these tastes are better than men without them. But this is not to say that they are better morally or intellectually. Byron's passion for the mountains and the

sea did not make him a faithful husband. The non-transfer of discipline from one field of thought to another, which is still widely ignored, was not generally understood a hundred years ago, and Wordsworth found it hard to believe that a man could love nature and still be cruel, selfish, or foolish. "Can he," the poet asks, who is considerate of wild flowers,

Whose feelings do not need the gross appeal
Of tears and of articulate sounds, can he
Be wanting in his duties to mankind
Or slight the pleadings of a human heart?

. . . for tutor'd thus

He needs must carry into moral things

A like forbearance. . . .

By this pure intercourse those bastard loves,
Those low and fickle yearnings of the heart,
The wayward brood of vanity, must die
Within him, and benevolence be spread
Like the sun's light upon the open sea.³⁰

In a later passage³¹ Wordsworth declares that, since natural objects excite "no morbid passions, no disquietude, No vengeance, and no hatred," the man who loves them, "unsatisfied with aught Less pure and exquisite," needs must look for what is lovable in his fellowmen until in time "a holy tenderness pervade[s] his frame . . . all his thoughts now flowing clear . . . he . . . seeks for good; and finds the good he seeks." The love of daisies is not, however, an infallible proof of virtue. Morality is not so simple as that; it includes the will and the intellect as well as the emotions. But even if the heart were all, it would not follow that, because a man loves his children, his dog, or his garden, he will therefore love his employees or his competitors.

It is important, therefore, to distinguish between the beliefs which grew up almost unconsciously in Wordsworth during his boyhood and which in his maturity were as a rule assumed rather than enunciated, and the opinions, definitely promulgated but of little importance in his life or thought, which he reasoned out after his meeting with Coleridge. The first he lived by, the second were intellectual efforts to justify the first. The two passages quoted above fall into the second class, and

the reference to benevolence and tenderness as well as the general tenor of the lines suggests that the theory was derived from eighteenth-century deists and sentimentalists.³³ Mr. J. W. Beach has recently shown how much of Wordsworth's theorizing about nature came from these and a few earlier writers who fused two meanings of the term: nature as the external world untouched by man, and nature as the norm of thought, of art, and of conduct.³³ This fusion was known to Wordsworth through eighteenth-century literature in praise of the out-of-doors, much of which reflects the belief of the Newtonians and deists that God is immanent in the external world and has revealed Himself in the reason, order, and beneficence apparent in it. The mingling of the two concepts was not, however, merely something he took over from books; he would doubtless have made it for himself. For presumably he grew up familiar with the notion, current in the eighteenth century and by no means unknown today, that nature in what may be termed the philosophic sense (which meant many things but had nothing to do with the woods and fields) represents conduct that should be followed; and at the same time to him the primary meaning of the word was always woods and fields. When, therefore, he sought an explanation of the ministry which he was conscious of receiving from the external world, the idea of nature as the norm of conduct and of art inevitably came to his mind.

By 1798 the two meanings of "nature" were so fused in his mind that he wrote:

Then is he wise
Who with unweari'd diligence repairs
To Nature as to an unerring rule
And measure of ennobling principles
Eternal and unchang'd,—correcting thus
Deformities that steal by easy steps
Into our heart.³⁴

It would seem that trees, clouds, and streams, instead of furnishing an objective, unerring, changeless standard, provide an ever-shifting and highly personal one, since they are of the world of flux and since the "rule" which may be derived from them is only a mirroring back to man, perhaps in grander

form, of something like the concepts—it may be the best of them—which he has already formed. Earlier even than this passage is one that makes the amazing claim:

The mountain's outlines and its steady forms . . .
 The changeful language of its countenance
 Gave movement to his thoughts and multitude
 With order and relation. (de S., 548)

The last two lines are clearer in the final version:

. . . aids the thoughts,
 However multitudinous, to move
 With order and relation. (vii. 759-61)

Wordsworth's most explicit identification of external nature with nature conceived as the norm of thought and action is the assertion:

I had been taught to reverence a Power
That is the very quality and shape
And image of right reason, that matures
 Her processes by steadfast laws, gives birth
 To no impatient or fallacious hopes,
 No heat of passion or excessive zeal,
 No vain conceits, provokes to no quick turns
 Of self-applauding intellect, but lifts
 The Being into magnanimity;
 Holds up before the mind, intoxicate
 With present objects and the busy dance
 Of things that pass away, a temperate shew
 Of objects that endure, and by this course
 Disposes her, when over-fondly set
 On leaving her incumbrances behind
 To seek in Man, and in the frame of life,
 Social and individual, what there is . . .
 Of kindred permanence. (xiii. A 24-42)

This is no chance remark, for the Wanderer says much the same thing and in the same connection: "By nature's gradual processes be taught" to distrust "sudden change."⁸⁵ In both cases the French Revolution and its plans for the rapid transformation of society are referred to. But it should be observed that Wordsworth's own familiarity with nature had not been

sufficient to prevent him from being completely carried away by impatient and fallacious hopes. Nor had it, in the words of the final text, "train[ed] To meekness."⁸⁶ He was not meek, just as Milton, Burns, Byron, Keats, Whitman, and many another lover of the out-of-doors has not been. Mountain peoples are generally supposed to be independent and self-confident. Perhaps Wordsworth would have pointed to the conservatism of the Cumberland shepherds as an illustration of the steadying influence of nature; but the farmers of New Zealand, Alberta, and the western United States in spite of their surroundings have shown themselves "over-fondly set On leaving . . . incumbrances behind," whereas instances of men who have been led by gazing upon mountains to pursue the permanent in social life are to seek. It should also be objected that nature may well give birth to fallacious hopes and heat of passion, that she does not always act with slowness and moderation, and does not consist exclusively of "objects that endure." The changes wrought by storms, floods, earthquakes, and fires are sometimes as sudden, as terrifying, and as destructive as the course of the French Revolution itself. "The busy dance Of things that pass away" includes most natural objects: clouds, flowers, plants, grasses, grains fade quickly; "the speaking face of earth and heaven" is ever changing; insects and most animals are short-lived; and "the mean and vulgar works of man" often outlast living things. To be sure, Wordsworth may have reflected that, although the individual daisy dies, daisies live on,⁸⁷ and that, by directing his attention to mountains and other relatively permanent phenomena, he was strengthening his pre-occupation with eternal things. This is true but it does not warrant him in implying, as he does, that nature consists mainly of "objects that endure" or that its influence is necessarily on the side of the permanent. Indeed, it is hard to find a sound basis for any of his assertions in support of his general claim that nature is the "image of right reason."

Every good thing, Wordsworth seems at times to feel, is attributable to her influence, even the beauty which is often encountered in humble country folk.⁸⁸ Genius "finds in her His best and purest friend" since she furnishes the "inter-

change Of peace and excitation " by which he thrives.³⁹ Now all persons need such an interchange but they are likely to find it more easily in a city, if the general tenor of their life is quiet, than in the country. Natural phenomena were much more exciting to Wordsworth than they are to most men but even he, after his first few years at Dove Cottage, suffered from the mental rigidity and stagnation that usually result from isolation.⁴⁰ Yet it was to loving intimacy with rivers, woods, and fields that he attributed much of his democracy as well as a " watchful eye "

Which with the outside of our human life
Not satisfied, must read the inner mind.⁴¹

The " ceaseless music " of the Derwent, he asserts,

with its steady cadence, tempering
Our human waywardness, compos'd my thoughts
To more than infant softness, (i. A 276-82)

and in London later, " the Spirit of Nature . . . diffused "

Through meagre lines and colours, and the press
Of self-destroying, transitory things,
Composure, and ennobling Harmony. (vii. 766-71)

Of his college reading he says:

The books which then I lov'd the most
Are dearest to me now; for, being vers'd
In living Nature, I had there a guide
Which open'd frequently my eyes, else shut,
A standard which was usefully applied,
Even when unconsciously, to other things
Which less I understood. (vi. A 117-23)

Elsewhere he generalizes this statement:

He, who in his youth
A daily wanderer among woods and fields
With living Nature hath been intimate . . . doth receive,
In measure only dealt out to himself,
Knowledge and increase of enduring joy
From the great Nature that exists in works
Of mighty Poets. (v. 586-95)

As the last two lines clearly mean the cosmic order or general scheme of things as seen by the imagination, the passage as a whole contains the astonishing affirmation that 'great poetry will mean far more to a man if, as a boy, he was "a daily wanderer among woods and fields."

Addressing the "mountains . . . lakes And sounding cata-racts, . . . [the] mists and winds That dwell among the hills where I was born," he exclaims:

If in my youth I have been pure in heart,
If, mingling with the world, I am content
With my own modest pleasures, and have lived
With God and Nature communing, removed
From little enmities and low desires,
The gift is yours. (ii. 424-32)

In thus attributing to nature much of what was best in his own personality Wordsworth overlooked the excellent stock from which he came—his sister and brothers were persons of character and ability—the unusual temperament with which he was born—in part a family inheritance—and his happy, hardy, independent youth and sound early training. Intellectually and morally he would have been much the same if, like Milton, Coleridge, Blake, and Lamb—all of whom were "pure in heart," that is, high-minded—he had been reared in London.⁴²

A conspicuous illustration of Wordsworth's fondness for attributing to the influence of nature qualities with which it has little or nothing to do is afforded by *Prelude* VIII. The sub-title of this book is "Love of nature leading to love of man," but this phrase will not fit the book that follows unless "love" has two unusual meanings, one when applied to nature and another when applied to man. For what Wordsworth really proves is that he gained a lofty conception of man through coming to know him in surroundings of grandeur and beauty. That is, by "love of nature" we have to understand no less than early association of man with sublime scenery which one loves; and by "love of man," an elevated view of human nature. Concerning the latter it should be noticed that Wordsworth speaks throughout the book of both love and reverence,

of "high thoughts of God and Man, and love of Man," of "noticeable kindliness of heart" towards man, and of regarding him as a "more . . . imaginative form";⁴³ he seems to think he has proved both. This is because he assumes that high thoughts of man inevitably lead to love of man in general, but the two are not always found together and where they are it is more likely that the love gave birth to the high opinion than the high opinion to the love. As a boy Wordsworth felt no strong love for mankind,⁴⁴ but such general affection as he had was probably an extension of his love for family and friends, which in turn sprang from instinct, from an affectionate, happy, unselfish disposition, early training, and the desire to be of use in the world. On this subject, however, VIII has little to say and the only illustration it gives of real affection, that of a father for his child, is drawn from city life. No effort is made to prove that love of nature leads to love of man; it cannot be proved. To be sure, any love is an exercise of the affections, and delight in nature, like any other pleasure, may well lead to a vague benevolence towards persons and things; but the influence of such emotion is negligible.

Yet throughout *The Prelude* nature's part in fostering the idealization of man is dwelt upon. We are told that when "the passions that build up our human soul" are intertwined with "high objects" we come to recognize "a grandeur in the beatings of the heart";⁴⁵ that Wordsworth was particularly fortunate in that he "first . . . look'd At Man through objects that were great or fair." It seemed to him almost impossible in "the deformities of crowded life . . . to think With admiration and respect of man,"⁴⁶ whereas among the mountains while yet a rambling schoolboy he had "felt his presence,"

As of a lord and master, or a power,
Or genius, under Nature, under God,
Presiding.

(viii. 257-60)

At times he had come suddenly upon a shepherd magnified to a giant by the mist, or glorified by the sunset, or silhouetted against the distant sky "a solitary object and sublime."

Thus was man
Ennobled outwardly before my sight,

And thus my heart was early introduced
To an unconscious love and reverence
Of human nature; hence [man became a]
. . . creature—spiritual almost
As those of books, but more exalted far. (viii. 275-83)

This reverence extended even to gipsies and other wanderers, perhaps because he did not know them intimately:

Yes, something of the grandeur which invests . . .
 The mariner who sails the roaring sea
 Through storm and darkness, early in my mind
 Surrounded, too, the wanderers of the earth.
 (xiii. 152-5)

When "the pulse of Being everywhere was felt, . . . Then rose Man . . . to a loftier height; As of all visible natures crown; . . . more than anything we know instinct With God-head." ⁴⁷ Likewise, when, in the city, he became conscious of the greatness of London's past and there "conversed with majesty and power. . . . The effect was, still more elevated views Of human nature." ⁴⁸ Later he gained

A more judicious knowledge of the worth
 And dignity of individual man, (xiii. 79-81)

and learned that nature can "breathe Grandeur upon the very humblest face Of human life." ⁴⁹

"Grandeur," "elevated views Of human nature," it is of these and not love of man that Wordsworth treats; and by "man" he means mankind in general, not individuals:

↙ The human nature unto which I felt
 That I belonged, and revered with love,
 Was not a punctual presence, but a spirit
 Diffused through time and space. (viii. 608-11)

He "looked for universal things," he stressed the unity of man, what all have in common, and minimized what he termed

Extrinsic differences, the outward marks
 Whereby society has parted man
 From man. (xiii. 218-20)

He did not love most of the men he met; it is doubtful if he was even interested in them or approved of them.⁵⁰ He would

have approved of them less if he had known them better—that is, more intimately. It was only through seeing them at a distance or through a mist which magnified them into giants, by associating them with the beauty, the grandeur, and the mystery of a mountain landscape, and by ignoring the little, individual traits and peculiarities which most of us find endearing that he was able to love them, just as he nourished his devotion to the church by absenting himself from its services.⁵¹ In such glorification of man nature undoubtedly assisted. Yet, by teaching him "to feel, perhaps too much, The self-sufficing power of Solitude,"⁵² and by isolating him from intimacy with ordinary men, she may have kept him from becoming interested in them and from loving them. For it is by a process the antithesis of the dehumanizing one described in *The Prelude* that most of us come to love our fellowmen: by drawing close to them until we come to need them, by learning toleration (which Wordsworth lacked) for their weaknesses, by observing their "little daily unremembered acts Of kindness and of love," by helping them and being helped by them. For such purposes the city or town serves at least as well as the country, since our affections grow through being exercised and the city dweller, having more contacts with his fellows, needs them more and becomes more interested in them than does the isolated shepherd. The sole incident in VIII which is likely to stimulate the *love* of man takes place in the city and has no connection with external nature: the sight of a bare-armed workman bending with deep affection over the sick child whom he has carried out into a public square.⁵³

According to Wordsworth's own account it was not until his twenty-third year, when he left the country and threw himself into the Revolution, that love of man meant much to him.⁵⁴ By his own showing, therefore, nature had accomplished little. In "Michael," which does deal with the country and which inspires tender regard for human kind, Wordsworth gives a different account of the development of this "diffusive sentiment": he early came to love the shepherds,

not verily

For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
Where ~~was~~ their occupation and abode.

(24-6)

This is pure associationalism, but nature is by no means the sole factor here. He liked shepherds because they were associated not alone with the fields and hills which he loved but with the happiest hours of his happy youth, with the period of his recovery from gloom, and with his great years at Dove Cottage.

The idea that love of nature leads to love of man was not a conviction that grew up within him but was a theory worked out to support his instinctive belief in Nature's goodness and beneficence. This instinctive belief gained strength from being shared by most of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors. Needless to say the sentimentalists held to it, but it was also stressed by the deists (who looked upon the external world as the revelation of the Deity) and repeatedly, often rapturously, asserted by eighteenth-century nature-writers. Wordsworth may well have been influenced in his belief by these poets and essayists—Thomson, Akenside, and Shaftesbury, for example,—whom he admired and whom he probably read in his school days. Yet he must have held it in any case for it was an instinctive faith, an assumption or intuition of his childhood. He loved the hills and streams so deeply that they must love him; the joy and inspiration he found in them together with the many other things he thought he found spoke clearly of their fostering care. This love, this care had been shown, he felt, throughout his own youth by the Beings with which his animism peopled the natural world:

Gentle Powers

Who give us happiness and call it peace. . . .

I believe

That there are Spirits which, when they would form
A favored being, from his very dawn
Of infancy do open out the clouds. . . .

. . . others too there are who use . . .

Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable. . . .

Ah not in vain, ye Beings of the hills, . . .
By moon or starlight, thus from my first dawn
Of childhood, did ye love to intertwine

The passions that build up our human Soul,
 . . . with high objects. . . .
 Ye Powers of earth, . . . not for trivial ends . . .
 Did ye with such assiduous love pursue
 Your favourite and your joy.⁵⁵

Wordsworth also speaks as if the river Derwent, who "lov'd To blend his murmurs with my Nurse's song," had striven to make him a poet; and asserts that in the silent faces of the clouds the young Wanderer could read "unutterable love."⁵⁶ His best-known expression of the idea is in "Tintern Abbey":

Nature never did betray
 The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead
 From joy to joy: for she can so inform
 The mind that is within us, so impress
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues . . .
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
 Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
 Is full of blessings. (122-34)

The belief in Nature as a loving power that exercises fostering care for man is an unwarranted assumption, which ignores not only "Nature, red in tooth and claw With ravine"⁵⁷ but the wastefulness and futility of much that goes on in the material world. As one of Wordsworth's staunchest admirers has pointed out:

Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood;
 Nature is stubborn, man would fain adore;
 Nature is fickle, man hath need of rest;
 Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave;
 Man would be mild, and with safe conscience blest.
 Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends;
 Nature and man can never be fast friends.
 Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave! ⁵⁸

Today, when nature is regarded not as a person but as a blind force, indifferent to man, it seems strange that Wordsworth could have closed his eyes to the many aspects of the physical world which are unpleasant or which do not fit in with his

preconceptions. We have seen that he ignored sudden, cataclysmic changes, such as floods, fires, and earthquakes, as well as the short life of most plants and animals, and dwelt upon the permanence, moderation, and regularity of nature. One other aspect of his optimistically selective conception of the external world merits some attention, his silence about storms. He must have encountered many in his native mountains and some in Scotland and Switzerland. They are not necessarily harmful and he might well have dwelt on their beauty, as Byron did, or on their contribution to the ministry of fear; yet I recall no descriptions of them in his poetry or his correspondence.⁵⁹ The obvious reason would appear to be that he did not particularly enjoy them; but it went deeper than this, it was part of his general dislike of turbulence, his love of the abiding. "The Gods approve The depth, and not the tumult, of the soul,"⁶⁰ and to his thinking they did not much approve the tumult of nature:

The wind, the tempest roaring high,
The tumult of a tropic sky,
Might well be dangerous food. ("Ruth," 121-3)

These lines are among the very few in which Wordsworth shows any consciousness that Nature sometimes does betray the heart that loves her, that she often seems capricious, wild, and voluptuous, and may encourage self-indulgence and lawlessness.⁶¹ The poem continues:

Whatever in those climes he found
Irregular in sight or sound
Did to his mind impart
A kindred impulse, seemed allied
To his own powers, and justified
The workings of his heart.

Nor less, to feed voluptuous thought,
The beauteous forms of nature wrought,
Fair trees and gorgeous flowers;
The breezes their own languor lent;
The stars had feelings, which they sent
Into those favoured bowers.

But the matter could not be left here:

Yet, in his worst pursuits I ween
 That sometimes there did intervene
 Pure hopes of high intent:
 For passions linked to forms so fair
 And stately needs must have their share
 Of noble sentiment. (127-44)

"Noble sentiment" this child of nature had, but not much else, as Wordsworth clearly saw.

He also saw that the same thing could sometimes be said of the dwellers in the hills where he was born. True, he ignored their faults and limitations, he idealized them (partly because their occupations and mode of life seemed "natural"),⁸² and he believed them to be more sensitive to the beauties of nature than they were;⁸³ but the short narratives introduced into *The Excursion* make clear that the unattractive side of country life did not escape his keen observation and strong matter-of-factness. It is a fundamental, though not uncommon, misunderstanding of his position to suppose he held that all who live close to nature are noble. Peter Bell was not, nor Harry Gill, nor the farmer of Tilsbury Vale, nor many of his other humble characters. Nature was not for him a philosopher's stone that turns everything to gold, a magic potion equally powerful with all persons and under all circumstances. Only when "the discerning intellect of Man [is] wedded to this goodly universe In love and holy passion" is there a glorious offspring.

Not in the lucid intervals of life
 That come but as a curse to party-strife;
 Not in some hour when Pleasure with a sigh
 Of languor puts his rosy garland by;
 Not in the breathing-times of that poor slave
 Who daily piles up wealth in Mammon's cave—
 Is Nature felt, or can be; . . .
 Nor has her gentle beauty power to move
 With genuine rapture and with fervent love
 The soul of Genius, if he dare to take
 Life's rule from passion craved for passion's sake.
 ("Not in the," 1-13)

Vain is the glory of the sky,
 The beauty vain of field and grove,

Unless, while with admiring eye
We gaze, we also learn to love.

("Glad sight," 5-8)

Similarly the much-criticized lines which exalt "one impulse from a vernal wood" do not imply that every one will receive the impulse, or learn much from it if it comes, or that even chosen spirits will receive it whenever they enter the woods. Wordsworth knew well from observation and his own experience that such was not the case. During his first university vacation the mountains among which it was spent seldom spoke memorably to him, and when he lay under the dominion of the eye although he enjoyed vivid transports he remained "to the moral power, The affections and the spirit of the place, Insensible."⁴⁴ But he also knew that there were moments of deep peace, of insight, hope, aspiration, and restoration—the greatest of which were his mystic experiences—which came to him during his communion with nature and, as a rule, only during such communion; and from these moments he was conscious of learning more, of gaining more, than he ever did from books. The vernal wood stanza is a vigorous exaggeration colored by Wordsworth's anti-intellectualism and, like all sweeping statements, it ignores many things; but it is essentially sound.

Much the same thing may be said of the poet's more deliberate assertion that he was

well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. ("Tintern Abbey," 107-11)

To be sure, the backbone of his moral being was his inheritance and early training, his growing up in an atmosphere of real piety, affection, and liberty, his association with men, women, and boys of character. This he assumes or overlooks, as he usually does; yet without it the forests and streams might have had no effect upon him morally or might have moved him as the landscape of Georgia did Ruth's lover. But, as the sun is called the life of the world although it can do nothing without earth and moisture, so Wordsworth termed nature the soul

of his moral being because it was the dynamic force in his ethical life. These lines, like the vernal wood stanza, are a vivid affirmation of Wordsworth's faith in the positive and creative as opposed to the inhibitive and corrective, his conviction that what was vital and fundamental in his morality and attitude towards life came to him not from books, precepts, or institutions, but through the senses from the ever-living universe.

It was, accordingly, no slight claim that he made in affirming "how exquisitely"

The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish.⁶⁵

Yet it should be observed that this claim does not rest upon the nature of the universe considered in itself but only in its relation to man. So far as influence is concerned the real character of an object or person does not matter; things are what we believe them to be. Mrs. Reiver in Kipling's story saves Moriarty as effectively as if she had been the paragon he thought her.⁶⁶ So it is with nature. Most persons have not visited the tropics or the polar regions, have never witnessed a volcanic eruption, an earthquake, or an avalanche, and have never been in a serious flood. In the main they forget even the many dreary and unpleasant days they have seen. Their minds, like sun-dials, register only happy hours. They find in nature simplicity, stability, peace, joy, freshness, and majesty—and such, for them, she is. They look upon her as loving, noble, wise, beneficent, interested in them, because they notice only the side of her which leads them to form such an opinion. For them her other aspects do not exist. The stars are not, as Keats calls them, patient; yet man may become himself more patient by gazing on them.

Obvious as these comments are, they are often overlooked or mentioned condescendingly by those who are disillusioned, deeply impressed by nature's indifference, and morbidly fearful of sentimentalism. Yet it is essential to any understanding of the subject to distinguish between what nature is and what she

may mean to man. So far as the conduct of life is concerned, what nature really is need be considered only as it affects what we conceive her to be and so what she may do for us. Wordsworth's assertions as to what nature is and his theories as to her fostering meekness, democracy, orderly thinking, and the love of man are of value only for the light they throw on his mind; but when he speaks of what she has done for him the case is entirely different. Here he is on solid ground. To be sure, the distinction is not always easy since he writes at times as if he owed well nigh everything to her. It may be partly on this account that some critics have been led to deny nearly all the claims he makes for the ministry of the external world. Persons who have themselves felt only relaxation and mild pleasure in the woods and fields are inclined to regard as sentimental nonsense the belief that sunsets, moonlight, and moving waters may bring deep joy, calm, consolation, uplift, scorn of little aims that end in self, and the integration of personality. The answer to such critics is to be found in the experience of those—and they are neither few nor, as a rule, intellectually contemptible—who have found in nature a great aid to noble living and high thinking. To Wordsworth she was clearly the greatest of such aids; the mighty world of eye and ear was the main gateway to the world of the spirit, the center of his emotional and religious life, the soul of his moral being, the chief means of communion with his higher self and with the Infinite.

O Nature! Thou hast fed
My lofty speculations; and in thee,
For this uneasy heart of ours, I find
A never-failing principle of joy
And purest passion.

(ii. 447-51)

He is here speaking not of something he has imagined or speculated about but of what he has experienced. It is the same, as we have seen, with his belief that he has owed to nature

another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery, . . .

Is lightened . . . Until . . . we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul.
 ("Tintern Abbey," 36-46)

It was "Nature's self, By . . . human love Assisted" that led him back from despair

To those sweet counsels between head and heart
 Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught with peace.
 (xi. 350-4)

Actual experience in Switzerland called forth the exclamation

Oh! sorrow for the youth who could have seen
 Unchastened, unsubdued, unawed, unraised
 To patriarchal dignity of mind,
 And pure simplicity of wish and will,
 Those sanctified abodes of peaceful man; (vi. 504-8)

and surely his own intercourse with nature is described in these vivid lines about the Wanderer's youth:

A Herdsman on the lonely mountain-tops,
 Such intercourse was his, and in this sort
 Was his existence oftentimes *possessed*. . . .
 . . . in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.
 All things . . . there
 Breathed immortality, revolving life, . . .
 There littleness was not. (Excursion, i. 219-30)

His reference to "the voice Of lordly birds"

Admonishing the man who walks below
 Of solitude, and silence in the sky,
 (Recluse, i. i. 129-33)

may sound like moralizing theory but probably records what was really felt on more than one occasion. For Wordsworth confesses elsewhere that he could "only cleave to solitude In lonely places."⁸⁷ This is a revealing remark since it tells *how* the mountains and the moors ministered to him: they quickened his sensibilities, furnished conditions favorable to meditation on the most significant themes, and called forth moods that led to such meditation. Only "in the mountains did he *feel* his faith"; only on the heaths and beside the streams did darkness

and mystery, and wonder, and salutary fear speak to him. In such places he composed most of his poetry. It was in this sense that "the speaking face of earth and heaven" was his "prime Teacher" and that he owed to it "so much of noble thought."⁸⁸ So when he declares that, "by principles as fixed" as those which govern its physical life, the ocean "shape[s] for mankind . . . The views and aspirations of the soul To majesty," that the hills have the same power, and that "the mountain's outline and its steady form Gives a pure grandeur" to the mind,⁸⁹ he is speaking of what he has seen and felt, in himself and others: the uplifting and enfranchising of the spirit by the mountains and the sea. His assertion needs qualifying since, as he well knew, it is true only of those who really care for ocean and upland and of them only in certain moods,—but he was not addressing the literal minded.

A cognate idea is implied in the sonnet:

Not 'mid the World's vain objects that enslave
 The free-born Soul—that World whose vaunted skill
 In selfish interest perverts the will,
 Whose factions lead astray the wise and brave—
 Not there; but in dark wood and rocky cave, . . .
 Here, mighty Nature! in this school sublime
 I weigh the hopes and fears of suffering Spain.

These lines, disfigured by the low opinion Wordsworth held of cities, express his conviction that nature enabled him to escape from absorption in the local, the selfish, and the trivial to a larger, saner, more impersonal attitude. In part this is true of us all. A man who lives in the business or industrial or political world is bound to absorb more or less of the standards, the sense of values, the point of view of that world. Among the mountains and by the sea, however, things look different: men and matters that seemed important shrink; acts that appeared shrewd now show as mean. So it had been with the young Wordsworth: not until he was back among the mountains and made once more the circuit of the lake did he realize the folly and futility of his first year at the university. This power of lifting the mind from the confines of the market place to a more lofty and unobstructed viewpoint is exerted most strongly by

mountains, the sea, the starry heavens, and other vast expanses. They are not national or local, ancient or modern. They are much the same at all times and in all places. They speak a language intelligible to all. Thus they may help free us from absorption in individual concerns, temporary and trivial interests. "I looked for universal things," Wordsworth exclaimed,⁷⁰ and nature assisted the quest.

There is, then, no sound basis for the current denial that Wordsworth received these ministrations through nature and that other men may to some extent share them. The exaggerated claims that he sometimes made are easily recognized and discounted since they did not arise from experience but from theory; they do not represent what nature had done for him but what he imagined she had done or might do. His assertions as to what nature is are of value only for what they tell us about him. He knew that, so far as influence is concerned, the external world is for man what he chooses to think it. From boyhood he instinctively thought of it as beneficent, noble, calm, orderly, and it influenced him in these directions. He ignored much and so was unaffected by the cruelty, waste, and mutability that he might have seen. Later poets have viewed nature more truly but have been less happy in the prospect. In belittling or refusing the joy, the peace, the inspiration, and the uplift that may be gained from the mountains and streams because mountains and streams do not themselves possess these blessings, they forget that "it is the love, the wonder, that is poetry and not the object of the love or wonder."⁷¹

NOTES

¹ xii. A 238.

² xii. 191-2. "Tintern Abbey" (1798) asserts that on his return from France, five years before writing the poem, nature

had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. (81-3)

^{2a} xiii. 79-84.

² i. 551; ii. 266-72.

⁴ xii. 253-61, 317-26.

⁵ The mystic experience that came to him, not when he crossed the Alps, but when, over thirteen years later, he described the crossing, is a striking illustration.

⁶ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, p. 935; see *ibid.*, 937, paragraph beginning, "Taking up the subject"); De Quincey, "The Lake Poets: William Wordsworth" in *Collected Writings*, ed. Masson, II, 246.

⁷ *Anima Poetae*, 1895, pp. 35-6, under the date October 26, 1803.

⁸ See Chapter III and pp. 141-6 below.

⁹ "Wordsworth in the Tropics" in *Do What You Will*, New York, 1929, pp. 126-38.

¹⁰ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, chapter IV (ed. Shawcross, I, 59). Basil Willey remarks: "The poetry [of Thomson and Pope] exists to decorate, to render agreeable, a set of abstract notions; and these abstractions have been taken over, as truth, from the natural philosophers—from Descartes, Newton, Locke, or Leibnitz. Wordsworth's beliefs, on the other hand, were largely the formulation of his own dealings with 'substantial things'; they were held intellectually only because they had first been 'proved upon the pulses'" (*The Seventeenth Century Background*, 1934, p. 299).

¹¹ v. 605; xii. 222-3; ii. 368-70; xiii. A 287-9.

¹² Letter to Wrangham of January, 1816. Cf. xii. 276-7; *Excursion*, iii. 940 ("With mind that sheds a light on what he sees"); "Yes! thou art fair," 3-4 ("sometimes I in thee have loved My fancy's own creation"); "Tintern Abbey," 105-7 ("the mighty world Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create, And what perceive"); letters to Lady Beaumont of May 21, 1807 ("the interest which objects in nature derive from the predominance of certain affections [in the beholder] . . . is . . . essentially poetic . . . because it is creative") and to Henry Reed of July 1, 1845 ("What I sh[ould] myself most value in my attempts . . . [is] the spirituality with which I have endeavored to invest the material Universe"). In xiv. 106 and in de S., 524, line 11, it is recognized that one may be "enslaved" by "objects of the senses." Arthur Hugh Clough records that as a boy he heard Wordsworth criticize the "tendency to exaggerate the importance of . . . scenery. . . . People come to the lakes, he said, and are charmed with a particular spot, and build a house, and find themselves discontented, forgetting that these things are only the *sauce and garnish* of life" ("On the poetry of Wordsworth," in Clough's *Prose Remains*, 1888, p. 321). The lines in Coleridge's "Ode to Dejection" beginning, "O Lady . . . in our life alone does Nature live" were originally addressed to Sara Hutchinson (see E. de Selincourt in *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, 1937, pp. 7-25) and therefore do not imply that Wordsworth held the opposite opinion.

¹³ See i. 416-18 n., Chapters III and IV.

¹⁴ vi. 621-40. ¹⁵ vii. 740-4; cf. viii. 215-22. ¹⁶ iii. 233-4; xii. 112-51.

¹⁷ i. 586-8.

¹⁸ xii. A 389.

¹⁹ ii. 304-5, 311.

²⁰ ii. 302-6.

²¹ xii. 88-151. See my notes to these lines.

²² "Recollections of Wordsworth" by Aubrey de Vere (Grosart, III, 488). See p. 22 above for the "exacting severity" of his standard of truth in descriptive poetry.

²³ De S., 601, lines 7-8.

²⁴ viii. 262-70; cf. A 81-101.

²⁵ De S., 601-2, lines 31-47.

²⁶ Unless it be in de S., 557-8, lines 171-202.

²⁷ See pp. 95-6 above. I am here using with slight changes his words to Beaumont of October 17, 1805.

²⁸ Coleridge, "Letter to a Junior Soph, at Cambridge," *Works*, ed. Shedd, New York, 1854, IV, 429.

²⁹ iii. 130-4; v. A 14-16.

³⁰ De S., 594, lines 71-89. It is noteworthy that this passage, which Wordsworth never published, was written as early as the summer of 1798. In vii. 745-9 he asserts that "the everlasting streams and woods . . . exalt The roving Indian" as the grandeur of the desert does the sunburnt Arab.

³¹ *Excursion*, iv. 1207-29.

³² "Of all the favorite ideas of the eighteenth century . . . the one that best maintained its popularity and most frequently made its appearance in all sorts of unexpected associations was that of benevolence . . . not only did the Shaftesburians have the terminology of benevolence continually on their tongues, but all the rest, from the most rigid rationalists at the beginning of the century to the Jacobins and utilitarians at the end, professed so much enthusiasm for universal benevolence as to give a distinctly sentimental turn to English thought" (Lois Whitney, *Primitivism and the Idea of Progress*, Baltimore, 1934, pp. 332-3).

³³ *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry*, New York, 1936, chapters II-VI.

³⁴ De S., 593, lines 39-45. It is unusual for Wordsworth to discover deformities in the heart. The Shepherd-lad of *Excursion*, iv. 800-10 finds his moral guidance not in external nature but "within himself."

³⁵ *Excursion*, iv. 260-94. As for "objects that endure" see i. 409 and n. It must not be forgotten that by fixing his attention upon the abiding and the slowly changing aspects of the external world Wordsworth was actually influenced by them towards conservatism. See pp. 117-18 above.

³⁶ xiii. 27-8. "Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree" affords an instance of a nature lover who "with the food of pride sustained his soul."

³⁷ He says something very like this in "Vernal Ode," 48-74, where he praises the "sweet vicissitudes" of the earth.

³⁸ xiii. 279-87; cf. "Three years she grew," 29-30, "beauty born of murmuring sound Shall pass into her face."

³⁹ xiii. 1-10. Cf. "Three years she grew," 7-12: in Nature, Lucy

Shall feel an overseeing power

To kindle or restrain.

⁴⁰ See pp. 111, 199 below.

⁴¹ ix. A 236-48 (less explicit in the final text); viii. A 66-8 (not in the final text).

⁴² To be sure, no London school could have given him the freedom, the "hardy independence," and the happiness he found at Hawkshead.

⁴³ 278, A 64, 124, 284. In *Excursion*, i. 362-4 he says that the Wanderer was "by nature tuned And constant disposition of his thoughts To sympathy with man."

⁴⁴ viii. 340-56; essentially the same in A.

⁴⁵ i. 405-14.

⁴⁶ viii. A 449-68. The final text reads:

to think
With a due reverence on earth's rightful lord,
Here placed to be the inheritor of heaven.

⁴⁷ viii. A 623-39.

⁴⁸ viii. 623-45.

⁴⁹ xiii. 283-7.

⁵⁰ See H. D. Rawnsley's "Reminiscences of Wordsworth among the Peasantry of Westmoreland" in *Wordsworthiana*, ed. W. Knight, 1889, pp. 79-119; the first chapter of Trelawny's *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (1858); and the first three paragraphs of Wordsworth's letter to Lady Beaumont of May 21, 1807. Yet he undoubtedly had an affection for shepherds in general and for mankind as a whole. He wrote Sir George Beaumont on October 17, 1805, "But for my part, strip my Neighbourhood of human beings, and I should think it one of the greatest privations I could undergo." See also xiii. 138-41, 160-278. In thinking of his fellow dalesmen as in thinking of nature he tended to ignore what was unpleasant; see pp. 113-15 above.

⁵¹ See Crabb Robinson's Diary for May 31, 1812. Miss Batho has shown that there were good reasons why for many years Wordsworth rarely attended church when he was at home (*The Later Wordsworth*, Cambridge, 1933, pp. 270-92), but unquestionably it was the idea of the church and the idea of man to which he was devoted.

⁵² ii. 76-7.

⁵³ viii. A 836-58. In the final text transferred to vii. 598-618 probably because Wordsworth realized that it does not illustrate the influence of nature or kind of love with which viii deals; but see viii. A 836-58 n.

⁵⁴ viii. 340-56 and de S. n.

⁵⁵ Variants in JJ and V of i. A 318-19, A 351-72, A 428-36, A 490-2. All of these passages as well as those that follow were written in 1797-8. The variant in A of viii. A 55-61, written after 1804, says that the mountain solitudes are frequented by "tutelary Powers . . . versed In weal and woe . . . Spirits gentle and benign."

⁵⁶ i. A 271-85 (this is in MS JJ); *Excursion*, i. 203-5.

⁵⁷ "This pointed phrase [from *In Memoriam*, lvi], as every good naturalist knows, is based on a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the 'struggle for existence,' and suggests that animal life is maintained at the cost of great cruelty and suffering, which is simply not true. In reality, as in appearance, animal life is essentially a world of bustling activity and wide-spread enjoyment. Sooner or later death comes to one and all, but in most cases quickly and unconsciously, as Alfred Russel Wallace pointed out long ago. Only in man, because he 'looks before and after,' does death necessarily entail an undercurrent of sadness and tragedy" (Walter Garstang, "Wordsworth's Interpretation of Nature," *Nature*, Supplement of January 16, 1926, p. 5).

⁵⁸ Matthew Arnold, "In Harmony with Nature," 7-14.

⁵⁹ This is the more surprising since he "too exclusively . . . sought *that* beauty, which . . . Hath terror in it" (xiv. 244-6); since he spoke of lightning, thunder, and storms as fearful but enjoyable objects (de S., 554, lines 52-4, cf. viii. 215-22); since he mentioned the Wanderer's "love" for "tempestuous nights—the conflict and the sounds That live in darkness" (*Excursion*, i. 280, 288-91, cf. *Prelude*, ii. 307); and since Lucy's form was to be moulded

by the grace which she would see "even in the motions of the Storm" ("Three years she grew," 21-4). See also *Excursion*, ii. 696-704; "Composed in Roslin Chapel during a Storm"; and pp. 218, 285 below. Yet he referred to "an indefinite terror and dismay, Such as the storms . . . Had bred in me" (viii. 513-15).

⁶⁰ "Laodamia," 74-5. The influence of this conviction on the omission of the Annette affair from *The Prelude* is touched on in pp. 285, 510-11 below.

⁶¹ *Prelude*, vi. 333-5 affords another instance:

Nature then was sovereign in my mind,
And mighty forms, seizing a youthful fancy,
Had given a charter to irregular hopes.

⁶² vi. 504-16; viii. 101-10, 124-7 ("noticeable kindliness of heart . . . there abounding most Where sovereign Nature dictated the tasks And occupations"); xiii. 290-3.

⁶³ See vi. 509-16 (not in A); "Michael," 62-77.

⁶⁴ xii. 118-21; A has "less sensible." The emphasis on "moral" in these lines, in those from "Tintern Abbey" quoted below, and in the vernal wood quatrain is noteworthy.

⁶⁵ *The Recluse*, "Prospectus," 66-71; cf. *Prelude*, v. A 10-17; de S., 557-8, lines 171-82, 194-202.

⁶⁶ "In Error" (*Plain Tales from the Hills*).

⁶⁷ iii. 233-4.

⁶⁸ v. A 11-13; Z variant of xii. A 75-128.

⁶⁹ vii. 750-7. The lines about the sea are not in A and those about the mountains (vii. A 721-3) are not in the final text.

⁷⁰ iii. 109. "That universal power" (ii. 324) seems to be nature. Wordsworth was attracted to mathematics because of its "permanent and universal sway" (vi. 131-3); he had faith in "the universal heart" (xiii. 220) and distrusted reason, which varies from man to man, from age to age.

⁷¹ Archibald MacLeish, "In Challenge not Defense," *Poetry*, LII (July, 1938), 217.

CHAPTER VII

ANTI-RATIONALISM

Reason is our Soules left hand.

Donne, "To the Countess of Bedford"

[Man] before certain Instinct, will preferr
Reason, which fifty times for one does err—
Reason, an *Ignis fatuus* of the Mind,
Which leaves the Light of Nature, Sense behind.

Rochester, "Satyr against Mankind"

My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true. The intellect is only a bit and a bridle. What do I care about knowledge? All I want is to answer to my blood.

D. H. Lawrence to Ernest Collings, January 17, 1913

The whole [romantic] movement is filled with the praise of ignorance and of those who still enjoy its inappreciable advantages—the savage, the peasant and above all the child.

Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, chapter II

One of the reasons why our people are alive and flourishing, and have avoided many of the troubles that have fallen to less happy nations, is because we have never been guided by logic in anything we have done.

Stanley Baldwin, in his last speech as Prime Minister

DEAN INGE has remarked: "Anti-intellectualism is our chief national failing. There seems to be a notion that cleverness and knavery are near akin. The apparent stupidity of the Englishman . . . has very nearly ruined us again and again." Similarly, Mr. I. A. Richards speaks of "the general disparagement of intellectual and theoretical effort, in literature as in life, which has been characteristic of our time . . . the general revolt against reason, which shows itself most flagrantly in mid-European politics, but is to be noticed, in varying forms, everywhere."¹ Such anti-intellectualism is indeed to be found

everywhere—in the religious, the business, the social world no less than in the political and literary, and that it is not limited in politics to mid-Europe is shown by the scorn expressed for President Wilson because he was a professor and for President Roosevelt because he summoned a "brain trust" of advisers from the universities. Anti-intellectualism is of many kinds: distrust of analysis as destructive of enjoyment,² distrust of theory as impractical, distrust of the intellect as blind to the heart and the soul, or as powerless to arrive at truth or to control conduct, distrust of bookishness as ostentatious pedantry, and distrust of great learning as characteristic of dull, tasteless grubs and as unfitting its possessor for practical life. Among educated men the English have been peculiarly susceptible to it because of their strong common sense and their admirable amateur spirit—their preference for "muddling through." But it is not restricted to any age or any nation. It flourished in the supremely rationalistic period of English thought and was especially marked in one of the greatest and most intellectual of the writers of that period, Jonathan Swift.

Wordsworth's anti-intellectualism was quite unlike that of Pope and Swift. He was not troubled by man's pride in his reason,³ by the apparent absurdity of certain scientific investigations, or by the seeming uselessness, in the practical world, of learning. He was likewise singularly free from that form of anti-intellectualism which consists in the belief that learning encumbers poetic genius, that the true poet does not need books and derives little from the study of his predecessors.⁴ Such romantic nonsense received short shrift at Wordsworth's hands, as would be expected of one whose closest friend was Coleridge, lover of all recondite and abstruse learning. There is nothing in Wordsworth's poetry or prose corresponding to Keats's "O fret not after knowledge."⁵ "Not that I slighted books," he exclaimed; "that were to lack All sense"; and again:

"Tis just that . . . I should . . .
 speak of them as Powers
 For ever to be hallowed; only less . . .
 Than Nature's self, which is the breath of God.

He affirmed that if the world were to be destroyed he would save two kinds of books, poetry and mathematics, and in concluding *The Prelude* he regretted that he had not said more of the ministry of literature to his development.⁶

Indeed there was in Wordsworth's thought a vigorous pro-intellectual strain. We can hardly ask for anything more emphatic than his declaration:

The logical faculty has infinitely more to do with poetry than the young and the inexperienced, whether writer or critic, ever dreams of . . . a discernment, which emotion is so far from bestowing that at first it is ever in the way of it.⁷

He lamented that

those palms achieved,
Through length of time, by patient exercise
Of study and hard thought (v. 8-10)

might easily be lost; he referred to "the majestic intellect"; to a "transport of the outward sense, Not of the mind," as inferior—"vivid but not profound";⁸ he pictured the "favour'd" individual as studying the external world with the aid of "the optic tube of thought that patient men Have furnished with the toil [of ages (?)]";⁹ he had a high regard for mathematics;¹⁰ and he spoke of the rivers and groves as

Calling upon the more instructed mind
To link their images with subtle skill
Sometimes, and by elaborate research
With forms and definite appearances
Of human life. (xiv. A 294-301)

Yet of bookishness he felt a wholesome distrust: "Books," he complained, "mislead us"; and when comparing himself with Southey (of whose poetry he thought little) he remarked, "Books . . . were, in fact, his passion; and wandering . . . was mine."¹¹ He was inclined to be hostile to science¹² and apparently held mere learning in light esteem. the outstanding characteristic of his conception of education is his minimizing the intellectual side and insisting that books and formal teaching are less important than play, association with other boys, and with nature. "Culture," wrote one of Wordsworth's

staunchest admirers, "culture is *reading*";¹⁸ but the poet himself would have denied this, and with vehemence. His conception of culture was, like Arnold's, the Greek ideal of the harmonious development of all our powers, physical, emotional, intellectual, ethical, spiritual; but books he held were merely one means of achieving this harmonious development and a means that had received too much attention and had produced a development not harmonious but one-sided. Furthermore, he valued books chiefly as a source not of knowledge but of inspiration and delight, of food for the imagination and the sense of wonder.

Wordsworth's boyhood and youth seem to have been less marked by intellectual interests than those of most men who later give evidence of considerable mental power. Like the average young person he lived chiefly by his instincts and emotions, allotting the intellect a lofty but remote place in his life. All this was changed by his residence in France at a time when moral, political, and economic theories took on "the attraction of a country in romance." For the French these were burning questions but for Wordsworth they remained largely theoretical since he was called upon, in the main, not to act but to judge. Later he read *The Rights of Man* and *Political Justice* and, as faith in France waned, turned more and more to abstract questions and to the consideration of general problems of conduct and government. As a result, theories every day

Grow into consequence, till round my mind
They clung, as if they were its life, nay more,
The very being of the immortal soul. (xi. 218-22)

Shortly thereafter, perplexed in mind and sick at heart, he "yielded up moral questions in despair."

From this quagmire of doubt into which the "meddling intellect" had led him he was rescued not by the intellect but, as is well known, by the love of Dorothy and Coleridge, by communion with nature, by friendly intercourse with humble neighbors, and perhaps by the steadying influence of a home with its daily tasks and absorbing practical interests. This period of despair was the chief crisis of his life and it left a deep impression, modifying or intensifying most of his prin-

cipal convictions. The influence may be summed up in one word, anti-rationalism: distrust of the analytical reason as, by itself, a fallacious guide to truth or to the conduct of life. His most serious error, as he saw later, had lain in trusting to one faculty and ignoring the others. He came to realize that truth is found only through the activity of the whole man; the affections, the will, and the senses are as necessary as the intellect. This had been proved in his own case: problems which the reason could not solve had been settled or had disappeared when he was restored to a normal life of the affections and the senses, and he had learned much from men in whom, because of their limited intellectual development, the intellect saw "no depth at all." Analysis tends to bring out the differences between men and to conceal their fundamental likeness, which the heart reveals. It was because education was directed mainly to training the intellect and neglected the development of "real feeling and just sense" that it had little relation to life and so was almost futile. "There lives," Wordsworth declared, "no faculty within us which the Soul Can spare,"¹⁴ and he condemned severely

Philosophers, who, though the human soul
Be of a thousand faculties composed,
And twice ten thousand interests, do yet prize
This soul, and the transcendent universe,
No more than as a mirror that reflects
To proud Self-love her own intelligence.

(*Excursion*, iv. 987-92)

In stressing the dangers of exclusive dependence on the reasoning faculty, Wordsworth usually calls particular attention—as in some of the passages quoted above—to the neglect of the emotions.

Dumb yearnings, hidden appetites, are ours,
And *they must* have their food, (v. 506-7)

even though the food be irrational—

Yet how forlorn, should *ye* depart,
Ye superstitions of the *heart*,
How poor, were human life!

("Wishing-Gate," 10-12)

The estate of man would be indeed forlorn
 If false conclusions of the reasoning power
 Made the eye blind, and closed the passages
 Through which the ear converses with the heart.

(*Excursion*, iv. 1152-5)

Such had been his "estate" in 1795, when,

as by simple waving of a wand
 The wizard instantaneously dissolves
 Palace or grove, even so did I unsoul
 As readily by syllogistic words
 Some charm of Logic, ever within reach,
 Those mysteries of passion which have made,
 And shall continue evermore to make,
 (In spite of all that Reason hath perform'd
 And shall perform to exalt and to refine)
 One brotherhood of all the human race. (xii. A 79-88)

It was largely to the affections, love of Dorothy and Coleridge, that he owed his restoration:

Nature's self,
 By all varieties of human love
 Assisted, led me back through opening day
 To those sweet counsels between head and heart
 Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught
 with peace. (xi. 350-4)

Only when a balance is maintained between the head and the heart can there be genuine knowledge, for, as Coleridge wrote, "deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep feeling."¹⁶ "Happy for us," Wordsworth exclaimed, "that the imagination and affections in our own despite mitigate the evils of that state of intellectual Slavery which the calculating understanding is so apt to produce."¹⁶ For "Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point."¹⁷

At the beginning of *Prelude* XIII Wordsworth praises external nature as the "image of right reason" and by implication contrasts it with false, analytical reason, which he and the French radicals had followed. Nature

matures
 Her processes by steadfast laws; gives birth

To no impatient or fallacious hopes,
 No heat of passion or excessive zeal,
 No vain conceits. . . .

(xiii. 22-6)

It was in part through communion with nature, under Dorothy's guidance, that he recovered from doubt and despair. To Raleigh this recovery seemed a "restoration of the life of the senses after the dark tyranny of a life of abstract thought."¹⁸ Yet both "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude* make clear that the life of the senses was "vivid," that "nature . . . was all in all" during Wordsworth's revolutionary and rationalistic periods.¹⁹ The change lay in the new importance attached to the senses, in the recognition of the spiritual ministry of nature through the medium of the affections, in substituting receptivity for critical analysis, and in wedding the inner faculties, formerly laid asleep, to external forms. Wordsworth now felt "'tis the *heart* that magnifies this life,"

Vain is the glory of the sky,
 The beauty vain of field and grove,
 Unless, while with admiring eye
 We gaze, we also learn to love—

that is, to love mankind. And if we have learned to love, "one moment of communion with nature may give us more Than years of toiling reason."²⁰ This joyous flaunting of the intellect expresses something deeper than the enthusiasm of a spring morning; in a way it is not even an exaggeration since "toiling reason" had brought the poet to confusion and despair. It was repeated by implication in the well known lines, likewise written shortly after his recovery and referring to it, in which he affirmed with quiet conviction that he was

well pleased to recognise
 In nature and the language of the sense
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being. ("Tintern Abbey," 107-11)

This is not the whole story, for nothing is said of the affections, of what is gained from other men and from early training, of the "no inglorious work" carried on "by logic and minute analysis";²¹ yet one thing is quite clear: that whereas Words-

worth had, a year or so before, yielded up moral questions in despair he now again found the sources of his moral strength and found them as remote as may well be from the realm of pure logic and analysis, in which he had formerly sought them.

The errors of exclusive devotion to the intellect are corrected not only by the affections and by a spiritualized and humanized communion with nature, but by intercourse with humble, hard-working fellow men and by entering into their lives. In the thirteenth book of *The Prelude* Wordsworth pays an extended and glowing tribute to the "men obscure and lowly" often "rude in show" "who are their own upholders, to themselves Encouragement, and energy, and will" whom he met on his walks about Racedown and Alfoxden. He had not been cut off from men in the immediately preceding years but these peasants were different, simpler and far less intellectual: the Michaels, the leech-gatherers, and children like the girl of "We are Seven" who figure largely in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Such persons solved their difficulties and learned to bear their burdens, not by the intellect alone, but by the will, the affections, the senses, not by thinking them out but by living.²² There could hardly be a better illustration of Wordsworth's anti-rationalism and of the completeness of his change than this turning to his humble neighbors for guidance. Such persons Godwin had declared could know little of either happiness or virtue.²³ Of theory, logical subtlety, and analysis they had scarcely heard; yet Wordsworth found them rich in wisdom.

It should be observed that these various correctives of the analytical reason are really inseparable. Wordsworth was helped not by the affections *and* nature *and* men but by the affections wedded to nature and men, by nature bound through the affections to men and to himself, and by men living close to nature in their "natural abodes," where the affections flourish.²⁴ His restoration thus deepened his sense of the unity of all and, by bringing his entire being into the quest for truth, gave him a new standard of values. He gained a firmer "trust . . . in the feelings," a "clearer . . . sense of what was excellent . . .,"

A more judicious knowledge of what makes
The dignity of individual Man,

Of Man, no composition of the thought,
Abstraction, shadow, image;

and thus

The promise of the present time retired
Into its true proportion; sanguine schemes,
Ambitious virtues pleased me less, I sought
For good in the familiar face of life
And built thereon my hopes of good to come.

(xiii. A 60-85)

He also came to realize the great truth which he and Godwin and other theorists and devotees of "pure reason" had overlooked:

We see, then, as we feel . . . the mind's repose
On evidence is not to be ensured
By act of naked reason. Moral truth
Is no mechanic structure, built by rule;
And which, once built, retains a steadfast shape
And undisturbed proportions; but a thing
Subject, you deem, to vital accidents;
And, like the water-lily, lives and thrives,
Whose root is fixed in stable earth, whose head
Floats on the tossing waves. (Excursion, v. 558-69)

Of all feelings the one which affects the operations of the intellect most strongly is joy. In his dark days he did not realize that an inlet into truth had been closed to him but, believing truth to be a purely intellectual matter, failed to see that his despair kept him from solving his problem, that in large part despair *was* his problem. Now he recognized "the deep power of joy" and wrote of "child-like fruitfulness in passing joy" and of

Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.²⁵

There is one other corrective to the errors and limitations of analytical reason to which Wordsworth came in time to attach considerable importance, the instincts. In his rationalistic period, instinct meant nothing to him because it is the crystallized experience of the individual and the race and he hoped "that future times *would* surely see, The man to come, parted, as by a gulph, From him who had been."²⁶ But later

he speaks of " *heaven-born* Instincts " ²⁷ and uses the word even in referring to his " debt " to the daisy:

And all day long I number yet,
All seasons through, another debt,
Which I, wherever thou art met,
To thee am owing;
An instinct call it, a blind sense;
A happy, genial influence,
Coming one knows not how, nor whence,
Nor whither going. (" In youth," 65-72)

He contrasted the wisdom of his mother's instincts in bringing up children with the folly of the educational theorists, and he praised her

faith that He
Who fills the mother's breast with innocent milk,
Doth also for our nobler part provide,
Under His great correction and control,
As innocent instincts, and as innocent food. (v. 271-5)

In matters of government he compared the instinctive wisdom of the Swiss peasants with the folly of the French *philosophes*:

May not we with sorrow say,
A few strong instincts and a few plain rules,
Among the herdsmen of the Alps, have wrought
More for mankind at this unhappy day
Than all the pride of intellect and thought?
(" Alas! what boots," 9-14)

His admiration for instincts led him even to write a poem in praise of presentiments:

God, who instructs the brutes to scent
All changes of the element,
Whose wisdom fixed the scale
Of natures, for our wants provides
By higher, sometimes humbler, guides,
When lights of reason fail.
(" Presentiments," 73-8)

But the great illustration of the trust Wordsworth put in the non-rational part of our nature is furnished by his animism. He implied so frequently and at times affirmed with such certi-

tude the existence of natural Powers and of Spirits of the air that there can be no question of his instinctive belief in them. Even when skeptical he seems to have felt somewhat as he did of the Arab of his dream, "that, in the blind and awful lair Of such a madness, reason did lie couched."²⁸ Animism he apparently thought to be, like other mysteries scorned by reason, a dim, anthropomorphic expression of the consciousness of the One Life in all things, and it should be revered because it keeps this great truth alive. At any rate in such assertions as "these solitudes are paced By tutelary Powers," or "I believe That there are Spirits which, when they would form A favored being . . . do open out the clouds . . . seeking him With gentle visitations," or

This Beast not unobserved by Nature fell;
His death was mourned by sympathy divine,²⁹

his position is directly opposed to that of "unassisted reason."

The limitations of analytical reason were due in no small degree, Wordsworth felt, to its method, the deliberate activity of the conscious mind. Only little truths are to be reached in this way; great truths are not found, they are given. Exertion only stirs up the waters and obscures our vision into the hiding places of man's power. Our part is to wait in quiet, to meditate, to receive.

"Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking?"

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—
We murder to dissect.

"Intuitive truths, [are] The deepest and the best." The higher love "proceeds More from the brooding Soul"; the "mighty Mind" is one

That feeds upon infinity, that broods
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
Its voices;

hence the poet brings us

The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.⁸⁰

Such receptivity, such "wise passiveness," waiting for the unconscious to well up into the conscious, was disturbed if not destroyed, Wordsworth found, by critical analysis. The changes in his feeling for external nature were an instance. During the period of his intellectual bigotry "the visible Universe . . . with microscopic view Was scanned"; hence he was critical, fastidious, absorbed in details and meager novelties, insensible to the spirit of the place; and "the love Of sitting thus in judgment" interrupted his deeper feelings.⁸¹ With his wife (or sister), who had escaped the domination of reason, it was otherwise:

far less did critic rules
Or barren intermeddling subtleties
Perplex her mind; but, wise as Women are . . .
She welcom'd what was given, and craved no more.
(xii. A 202-7)

Such had been the attitude of the poet's mother towards all life—she "loved The hours for what they are";⁸² and such had been his own attitude towards nature until he became absorbed in the Revolution:

I felt, and nothing else; I did not judge,
I never thought of judging, with the gift
Of all this glory fill'd and satisfi'd. (xii. A 234-40)

So it is with most children: they trust to their vivid sense impressions, their feelings, their instincts—which is no small element in Wordsworth's glorification of childhood. From such glad acceptance⁸³ most adults are excluded by the critical, analytical activity of their intellects:

we, who now
Walk in the light of day, pertain full surely
To a chilled age, most pitiably shut out
From that which *is* and actuates, by forms,
Abstractions, and by lifeless fact to fact
Minutely linked with diligence uninspired . . .
By godlike insight.
(*"Musings near Aquapendente,"* 323-30)

Wordsworth here touches on another side, a complementary aspect, of the matter: the mind must be active as well as passive, must create as well as receive. Like the fruit tree it must wait until warmth and rain are sent and then transform them into a new creation. Only so shall our truth have vitality, only so can it be "carried alive into the heart by passion." Such creative activity was stultified by pre-occupation with logic and analysis, which crushed not only spontaneity and the sense of wonder but the shaping spirit of the imagination. Over-emphasis on the intellect in the schools Wordsworth looked upon as "a pest That might have dried me up, body and soul."⁸⁴ It had dried up many, making their truth a dead thing—

ye who pore
On the dead letter, miss the spirit of things;
Whose truth is not a motion or a shape
Instinct with vital functions, but a block
Or waxen image which yourselves have made,
And ye adore! (viii. 293-301)

Elsewhere he speaks of "all the narrow estimates of things" derived from "logic and minute analysis" and hints that

danger cannot but attend
Upon a Function rather proud to be
The enemy of falsehood, than the friend
Of truth, to sit in judgment than to feel. (xii. A 130-7)

Here again he was in agreement with Coleridge, who was grateful to the mystics because "they contributed to keep alive the *heart* in the *head*; gave me an indistinct, yet stirring and working presentiment, that all the products of the mere *reflective* faculty partook of DEATH."⁸⁵

He likewise agreed with Coleridge in thinking that the analytical reason gives no sense of the whole, that it disregards organic unity, and, studying all things "in disconnection dead and spiritless," misconceives them; for the part can be understood only in its relation to other parts, which determine its structure, its function, its very existence.⁸⁶

The distinction between reason and understanding (*Vernunft* and *Verstand*), which was suggested to Coleridge by seven-

teenth-century English writers, made explicit by Kant, and passed on to his friend, could not have been clear in Wordsworth's mind at the time of his recovery since Coleridge did not then know Kant;⁸⁷ but the *account* of the recovery and the other anti-intellectual passages in *The Prelude* belong mainly to 1804-5, when the influence of Coleridge was strong. Yet here, as in most instances of this influence, Coleridge's chief service was probably to give definiteness and to affect the formulation of ideas which had been developing vaguely in the less philosophic mind of his friend. There can be no question that after 1804 Wordsworth was conscious of two kinds of reason: "the grand And simple Reason," the *Vernunft*, and

that humbler power
Which carries on its no inglorious work
By logic and minute analysis, (xii. A 124-6)

the *Verstand*, which Coleridge termed "the understanding." The importance of the distinction lies in the belief that the latter, which guides us in practical matters and in most of our every-day concerns, can give us no knowledge of higher truths; that such knowledge can be gained only through the former, "a Reason which indeed Is reason," "Reason in her most exalted mood,"⁸⁸ a rare faculty that is seldom found without imagination and deep feeling. The rationalists, Wordsworth felt, possessing only the humbler power, applied it confidently to matters of which it could tell them nothing—as if one could learn about ultra-violet light rays with the unaided eye because it is adequate for part of the spectrum. Those who lacked "the more-than-reasoning Mind"⁸⁹ had no "access"

to principles of truth,
Which the imaginative Will upholds
In seats of wisdom, not to be approached
By the inferior Faculty that moulds,
With her minute and speculative pains,
Opinion, ever changing! (*Excursion*, iv. 1126-32)

Accordingly, they denied

those truths,
Which unassisted reason's utmost power
Is too infirm to reach. (*Excursion*, v. 520-22)

Wordsworth, on the contrary, had come to look upon "intuitive truths" as "the deepest and the best";⁴⁰ he had been conscious, when French monarchists sought to convert him to their cause, that

their reason seemed
Confusion-stricken by a higher power
Than human understanding. (ix. 258-60)

The organ of this profounder insight, of the *Vernunft*, he sometimes terms "the heart." He urges us to leave "our meddling intellect" and bring with us "a heart That watches and receives"; he says of "the hour of feeling,"

One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason;⁴¹

he speaks of "the truth received into my heart,"⁴² and of

all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart. (ii. 403-5)

In these and similar lines Wordsworth is clearly not referring to ordinary human affection but to the higher, more intellectual love which he has elsewhere declared to be inseparable from the imagination,⁴³ and which is closely connected with the *Vernunft*.

He also believed "that spiritual Creatures round us move, Grievs to allay which Reason cannot heal";⁴⁴ and he wrote of Mrs. Southey after her mind failed,

delegated Spirits comforts fetch
To Her from heights that Reason may not win.
Like Children, She is privileged to hold
Divine communion. ("Oh what a Wreck," 6-10)

This last passage should remind us that Wordsworth was made more conscious of the inadequacy of the understanding by his mysticism. For the mystic does not reason, he knows, he "hold[s] Divine communion"; and Wordsworth's certitude, so long as he was certain, had always rested on moments of insight like his dedication and his first walk round the lake after returning from the university. So early as 1798 or 1799 he had "seemed to learn"

That what we see of forms and images
Which float along our minds, and what we feel
Of active or recognizable thought,
Prospectiveness, or intellect, or will,
Not only is not worthy to be deemed
Our being, to be prized as what we are,
But is the very littleness of life.
Such consciousness I deem but accidents,
Relapses from the one interior life
That lives in all things.

(de S., 512)

A person who held to this opinion, that all true knowledge arises from union with the One, would naturally look upon analytical reason as "that false secondary power By which we multiply distinctions"⁴⁵ and would be repelled by the complacent blindness of the devotees of such reason. These men oversimplified problems by ignoring vital but elusive elements, the importance of which their limitations kept them from feeling.

Of this it seemed to him there was no better evidence than their callow unawareness of the mystery which lies at the heart of all reality. Wordsworth himself in his rationalistic period had unsouled the mysteries of being as readily as a magician dissolves a magic palace,⁴⁶ but when he came to himself it was with a profound conviction that "conquering Reason . . . Can nowhere move uncrossed by some new wall Or gulf of mystery."⁴⁷ He makes frequent references to this belief,⁴⁸ but most of these say no more than what every one feels, and their number gives little indication of the importance mystery occupied in his thought. For, no less than solitude, silence, and loneliness (to which it owed not a little), mystery entered into nearly all of the memorable experiences of his youth: "snaring woodcocks, robbing birds' nests, fleeing the mountain that "strode after" him, listening on stormy nights to "the ghostly language of the ancient earth," sitting alone at dawn to gaze upon the slumbering valley, watching at twilight the heap of clothes by the lake, beholding a shepherd suddenly emerge from enveloping mists, encountering the discharged soldier, or the blind man on the streets of London, crossing the Alps, await-

ing dawn at Gravedona, fleeing the place of the gibbet, looking out for the horses which were to carry him home, or ascending Snowdon. Obviously, it was an element in his great moments of mystic or quasi-mystic experience and no less obviously it is close to that "visionary feeling" which Bradley finds "so essential to . . . Wordsworth's most characteristic poems that it may almost be called their soul."⁵⁰ It is to be found in much of the greatest verse and is implicit and is dimly felt in many lines in which we do not consciously recognize its presence:

The silence that is in the starry sky
The sleep that is among the lonely hills;

a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused;
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides;

'twas a sound

Of something without place or bound;
The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone;

the wind and sleety rain . . .

The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
And the bleak music from that old stone wall.

And surely it was largely because of their mystery that "the echo, rainbow, cuckoo, and glowworm all haunt Wordsworth's poetry as they haunted his mind from childhood";⁵¹ and it was awareness of the "mysteries of being" that led him to dwell upon "the eternal deep," "the dark abyss" over which a mighty Mind "broods," and to think of such a mind as "exalted by an underpresence . . . or whatsoe'er is dim Or vast in its own being."⁵² Furthermore, he had a mystery ever before him in his art, for the will could not control his greatest achievements in poetry nor could the understanding explain how they came to pass.

Doubtless Wordsworth appreciated the element of strangeness in beauty, the interest, the lure which mystery adds to reality—

aught that for its grace may be
Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery.⁵³

But it was not for its esthetic value that he treasured mystery. As a boy he had been unwilling to disenchant, by discovering its cause, the diamond light that flashed from a copse-clad bank,⁵⁴ but in maturity he cherished mystery not as an escape from reality but as reality itself. The more he studied nature and life the more wonderful even the simplest things became—"the meanest flower that blows" gave "thoughts . . . too deep for tears"; one who has "such stores as silent thought can bring" finds "a tale in every thing";⁵⁵ in the London crowd he felt, "the face of every one That passes by me is a mystery"; and in the brief personal history a blind man bore on his chest he saw "an apt type . . . of the utmost we can know Both of ourselves and of the universe."⁵⁶ It was only to the dulled sensibilities of a materially-minded Peter Bell that a primrose by a river's brim was a yellow primrose and nothing more; only a shallow person held that intellectual progress had dissipated mysteries, had explained the inner or the outer world, or supposed that scientific laws do more than describe the ways in which things act. Life, death, love, reproduction, electricity, the weather, chemical changes are more mysterious to the student than to the peasant; and as for mental processes,

each most obvious and particular thought,
Not in a mystical and idle sense,
But in the words of Reason deeply weighed,
Hath no beginning. (ii. 229-32)

Hence the value Wordsworth set upon the child's great gift of thoughtful wonder. In the fortunate adult for whom this gift survived it became the consciousness of mystery.

Yet it is only in highly imaginative minds that the sense of mystery is strong. It was Wordsworth's imagination that enabled him "if the night blackened with a coming storm" to hear "notes that are The ghostly language of the ancient earth"; it was his imagination that peopled his mind with "huge and mighty forms, that do not live Like living men," that made the sky seem "not a sky Of earth," that gave significance to a simple encounter with a leech-gatherer or old beggar or the sight of a moorland waste, a naked pool, a woman with her garments vexed and tossed. Accordingly,

when his imagination was "impaired" his sense of wonder and mystery weakened, and he may at this time have regarded such things as bits of childish superstition. But as he looked back upon the period he realized that he, and many who continued to think as he had thought, were denying the validity of emotions because they did not feel them, were ignoring an essential element in life because (as a biologist might say) it passed through their crude filters. For as the values by which in the main we live are not inherent in things but are given to them by our emotions, intellectual analysis can tell us nothing of them. Like the inhabitants of the Country of the Blind in H. G. Wells's story, Wordsworth had thought that the errors of those who clung to the old prejudices should be corrected by removing the organ of vision which they possessed and he lacked.

Wordsworth found mystery everywhere—in God, in nature, in the union of "soul and sense," in the human body, and in human life, but most of all in the mind of man:

I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink
 Deep— and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds
 To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.
 All strength—all terror, single or in bands,
 That ever was put forth in personal form—
 Jehovah—with his thunder, and the choir
 Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones—
 I pass them unalarmed. Not Chaos, not
 The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
 Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
 By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe
 As fall upon us often when we look
 Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—
 My haunt, and the main region of my song.

(*Recluse*, "Prospectus," 28-41)

O Heavens! how awful is the might of souls,
 And what they do within themselves. . . .

. . . but in the main

It lies far hidden from the reach of words. (iii. 180-7)

Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth

Proceed thy honours. I am lost . . . (xii. 272-3)

This sense of mystery doubtless came in part from the mountains and mists among which Wordsworth grew up. The lake country is a region of awe and strangeness, one that may easily inspire visions but seems in ill accord with any purely intellectual or logical conception of the universe. It might also lead an imaginative person to a belief in an immanent deity, to a consciousness of the one interior life in all objects, which Wordsworth tells us came to him in his seventeenth year. This belief is itself a mystery. It means that things are not what they appear but what we feel them to be. If the waves and the loose stones of the highway have a "moral life," are permeated by spirit,⁵⁷ mystery is everywhere. So it must have seemed to a youth of strong sensibilities, tinged with animism, seeing Powers and Presences about him, inclined to conceive of natural forces and natural objects as persons, and often unable to think of external things as having external existence so that he grasped at a wall to bring himself back to reality. Professor de Selincourt calls attention to "the significance of Wordsworth's use of nouns compounded with the prefix 'under,' " and adds, "He needed these words to express his profound consciousness of that mysterious life which lies deep down below our ordinary, everyday experience, and whence we draw our power." Wordsworth's own phrase is "the hiding-places of man's power."⁵⁸

It was largely because they were insensible to mystery that men developed pride of intellect. For only a person of perceptions and experiences so limited that he is insensitive to the mystery in which our souls abide could feel confident and complacent of his understanding of life. "Pride," Wordsworth declared, "... Is littleness,"⁵⁹ and he spoke from experience. For in his rationalistic period he had been "feeble . . . through presumption"; "proud of [his] own endowments" he had "rejoiced To lay the inner faculties asleep."⁶⁰ The fault was common at the time, for during the French Revolution there arose

A proud and most presumptuous confidence
In the transcendent wisdom of the age.

(*Excursion*, ii. 234-6)

Later he felt that it was "pride of intellect" which had led the nations away from the instinctive wisdom of common man.⁶¹ Wordsworth's frequent references to intellectual pride⁶² are surprising until we realize that it was opposed to some of the deepest things in his nature: his consciousness of the mystery of life, his reverence for "the unassuming things"—scorned by pride—"that hold A silent station in this beauteous world,"⁶³ his strong common-sense, which led him to distrust theory, and his conviction that pride interfered with the "wise passiveness," the quiet receptivity through which alone great truths come to us.

Wordsworth's anti-rationalism was more pervasive, it affected more of his poems and more aspects of his thought, than is generally realized. Legouis has pointed out that "The Last of the Flock"—and the same is true of "Michael"—shows that private property, however irrational, however (as Godwin insisted) fruitful of vice and misery to the poor, is also bound up with and the source of deep and noble feelings; that "The Old Cumberland Beggar" reveals beggary, however evil in theory,⁶⁴ as fruitful of genuine good; that "The Idiot Boy" illustrates the joy, pride, and moral good that may be developed by an irrational affection; that "We are Seven" and "Anecdote for Fathers" hold up children as happier and wiser than many rational men although, in the words of Legouis, "not amenable to logic, tenacious of ideas for which no origin could be assigned, provided with their own peculiar convictions, and possessed of a natural substratum which eluded analysis."⁶⁵ Wordsworth finds a seer in the unintellectual Leech Gatherer; he contrasts the insight of his wife (or sister) with his own folly in allowing "barren intermeddling subtleties" to perplex his mind.⁶⁶ He welcomes the poet as one "contented if he might enjoy The things which others understand," but he bids the philosopher—"one that would peep and botanize Upon his mother's grave"—to take his "ever-dwindling soul, away," and he tells the moral theorist, who

has neither eyes nor ears;
Himself his world, and his own God;
One to whose smooth-rubbed soul can cling

Nor form, nor feeling, great or small;
 A reasoning, self-sufficing thing,
 An intellectual All-in-all!

to sleep in his "intellectual crust." ⁶⁷

In his moral judgments Wordsworth was by no means limited to the point of view of a rigorous rationalist. His tolerance of sexual irregularities shocked Miss Fenwick,⁶⁸ and his apparent indifference to lying in "Beggars" and its sequel "Where are they now?," to stealing in "The Two Thieves" and "The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale," and to drunkenness in "The Waggoner" may have shocked others. In these poems he intended to point out that, reprehensible as such sins are, that is not the whole story—as Godwin may have supposed. Where the reason saw only lying, thieving, and riot, the heart and the esthetic sense saw beauty, joy, youthful exuberance, kindness, or the sheer delight in living; and these are so precious that we must prize them wherever they appear and must make the best of their possessors. Similarly the Pagan vividly aware of life and beauty in the external world is to be preferred, despite his outworn creed, to the Christian absorbed in getting and spending—"Superstition [is] better than apathy"; so too "the bold credulities" of the monks are better than "Reason's triumphs" when "the Genius of our age . . . Boastful Idolatress of formal skill" views "Matter and Spirit . . . as one Machine." ⁶⁹ Wordsworth is reported as having remarked to Hamilton:

All science which waged war with and wished to extinguish Imagination in the mind of man, and to leave it nothing of any kind but the naked knowledge of facts, was, he thought, much worse than useless; and what is disseminated in the present day under the title of "useful knowledge," being disconnected, as he thought it, with God and everything but itself, was of a dangerous and debasing tendency. For his part, rather than have his mind engrossed with *this* kind of science, to the utter exclusion of Imagination, and of every consideration but what refers to our bodily comforts, power and greatness, he would much prefer being a superstitious old woman.⁷⁰

The White Doe of Rylstone furnishes a striking illustration of the beneficent power of forces hidden from the intellect, for the "stern . . . melancholy" which settled upon Emily was

dissipated by the companionship of the doe. Wordsworth emphasized the super-rational nature of this influence by prefixing to the canto in which it is exerted these strongly anti-intellectual lines from his "Address to Kilchurn Castle":

Powers there are
That touch each other to the quick—in modes
Which the gross world no sense hath to perceive,
No soul to dream of.

There is no need to follow this aspect of Wordsworth's thought through the implications of his numerous short poems. It is, however, worthy of note that his belief in so important a matter as immortality appears to rest on non-rational grounds: "We are Seven" pictures the child's instinctive refusal to accept the reality of death, and the Immortality Ode dwells on the feeling of pre-existence and on the mystic experience. As to the longer poems, Wordsworth wrote Mrs. Clarkson in December, 1814, "One of the main objects of *The Recluse* is to reduce the calculating understanding to its proper level among the human faculties"; and the extracts cited show that in *The Excursion* this purpose was faithfully carried out. Furthermore the restoration of the Solitary was to have been accomplished not by reasoning but by the sight of a "religious ceremony . . . which, by recalling to his mind the days of his early childhood . . . might have dissolved his heart into tenderness, and so done more towards restoring the Christian faith in which he had been educated, and, with that, contentedness and even cheerfulness of mind, than all that the 'Wanderer' and 'Pastor' by their several effusions and addresses had been enabled to effect." ⁷¹

~~*The Prelude* is deeply and pervasively, although in general not obviously, anti-rational. This bias is most clearly seen in the discussion of education (v) and in the account of the poet's recovery from despair (xii, xiii) but it is implicit almost everywhere. The incidents dwelt upon and the subjects treated—imagination and the higher love, the ministry of nature, of solitude, and of wonder, the value of childhood, of association with humble folk, and of the life of the senses—these matters, which seemed to Wordsworth of the highest~~

moment, weigh but little in the scales of analytical reason. What would Godwin have thought of the "huge and mighty forms" that moved slowly through the boy's mind? of the "Souls of lonely places"? of "Visionary power"? of passion which is "highest reason"? What do most scientifically-minded persons think of them today?

It may be objected that what has here been said but illustrates at length what after all might well have been expected, since all poets are anti-intellectual and if Wordsworth differed from the rest it was only because he was a vague romanticist, a humanitarian who disliked the labor of hard thinking. This objection has in reality less to support it than might be supposed. Romanticism was in the eighteenth century a learned movement and the great romantics of the nineteenth century—Scott, Landor, Coleridge, Lamb, DeQuincey, Hunt, Shelley, Keats, Hazlitt, and Byron—were, except for Byron and Wordsworth himself, students and fairly learned men, certainly not anti-intellectuals. The intellectual interests of Coleridge and Shelley were insatiable and Keats wrote: "I find that I can have no enjoyment in the World but continual drinking of Knowledge . . . there is but one way for me—the road lies through application study and thought. I will pursue it."⁷² Wordsworth was not learned but he had a genuine respect for learning; he did not ridicule the Bentleys and Theobalds of his day but made friends of such of them as he encountered: Coleridge, William Rowan Hamilton, the astronomer, Humphrey Davy, John Payne Collier, and John Stuart Mill. Mill was struck on meeting him with "the extensive range of his thoughts . . . the catholic character of his ability . . . the extreme comprehensiveness and philosophic spirit which is in him." "Wordsworth," he declared, "seems always to know the pros and the cons of every question."⁷³ No indictment of general anti-intellectualism can, therefore, be brought against him; nor can his attitude in the matter be dismissed as merely characteristic of his time or of poets as a class. It rose out of bitter experience and was matured into a settled conviction through years of meditation. Furthermore, he had known boundless faith in the intellect, a faith to which he had long clung desperately as if it were "the very being of the immortal soul." When he renounced it he

did not give himself up to day-dreaming or to sentimental humanitarianism

nor sate down

In reconciliation with an utter waste
Of intellect; such sloth I could not brook,
(Too well I loved, in that my spring of life,
Pains-taking thoughts, and truth, their dear reward)
But turned to abstract science, and there sought
Work for the reasoning faculty enthroned. (xi. 323-9)

Such is not the course of one who shuns hard thinking; and indeed the last three books of *The Prelude*, the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, and the other important critical utterances reveal a mind not brilliant, often prejudiced and vague, but tough, original, and profound.

This is not to say that Wordsworth's anti-rationalistic utterances constitute a complete, judicious presentation of the case. They were not so intended; they have the limitations and dangers of any strong statement of one side of a question. They ignore, for example, the corrections which analytical reason offers to the extremes and vagaries of intuition—for insight is often merely "my sight." Wordsworth himself was blessed with a common sense so strong that such corrections were often almost instinctive and he underestimated the need of them on the part of persons less happily endowed. But so far as he goes what he says is sound and by no means obvious.⁷⁴ He was not a sentimentalist, believing that if the heart is right nothing else matters. The heart may mislead as well as the head. "Human salvation must, he saw, . . . demand the exercise, not of this or that isolated faculty, but of the real and undivided self, whose presence or absence in the operations of the various faculties renders them either fruitful or barren of truth."⁷⁵ Ignorant as we still are, the desperate need of the world today, as in Wordsworth's time—for the years preceding the present war were not unlike those which led up to and succeeded Waterloo,—is not for more intellect but for more will to use it, and more love to use it wisely.

NOTES

¹ I. A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination*, 1934, pp. 137-8. Dean Inge's remark is quoted from *The Nineteenth Century and After*, February, 1930, p. 159.

² Cf. Goethe's *Werther*, November 30: "Hast du [Gott] das zum Schicksale der Menschen gemacht, dass sie nicht glücklich sind, als ehe sie zu ihrem Verstande kommen, und wenn sie ihn wieder verlieren!" (translation of 1801, section lxxxix, "Is man happy only before he attains reason and after he has lost it?"). The hostility to science found in Petrarch, in many neo-classicists, and in later "humanists" may arise from one or from several of the reasons mentioned above or merely from the antipathy of the leisurely, cultivated amateur for the professional.

³ See A. O. Lovejoy, "'Pride' in Eighteenth-century Thought," *Modern Language Notes*, xxxvi (1921), 35-6: "The condemnation of 'pride,' then, is frequently, in the eighteenth century, one of the ways of expressing a primitivistic anti-intellectualism. Rousseau was but repeating a current commonplace when he wrote in the *Premier Discours* that 'toutes les sciences, et la morale même, sont nées de l'orgueil humain,' and that 'le luxe, la dissolution et l'esclavage ont été de tout temps le châtiment des efforts orgueilleux que nous avons faits pour sortir de l'heureuse ignorance où la sagesse éternelle nous avait placés.'"

⁴ In the words of William Duff, "he is self-taught. He comes into the world as it were completely accomplished" (*An Essay on Original Genius*, second ed., 1767, p. 281). Duff means "entirely self-taught."

⁵ Letter to Reynolds of February 19, 1818. These words, attributed to the thrush, represent only a passing though recurrent mood (see *Philological Quarterly*, xiv, 1935, 289-300); but Keats seems to have held consistently another form of anti-intellectualism, that expressed in his letter to Bailey of November 22, 1817: "I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consequitive reasoning."

⁶ iii. 367-8; v. 213-21, 156-61; xiv. 312-13. For other references to books see iii. A 524-30 n.

⁷ Letter to W. R. Hamilton of September 24, 1827. See also the remark to Hamilton quoted on p. 271 below.

⁸ xii. A 145, A 188-9.

⁹ De S., 557, lines 149-50.

¹⁰ See vi. 115-67 n.

¹¹ xiii. 208, Fenwick note to *The Excursion*.

¹² See *Excursion*, iii. 159-93; iv. 968-94, 1251-63, and Herbert Dingle, "The Analytical Approach to Wordsworth," *The Realist*, I (June, 1929). But see also *Excursion*, viii. 199-213 and Edith C. Batho's *Later Wordsworth*, Cambridge, 1933, pp. 23-32.

¹³ Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, the last paragraph of the original Preface.

¹⁴ "Musings near Aquapendente," 341-3. Compare *Biographia Literaria*, chapter xiv (ed. Shawcross, II, 12), "The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity."

¹⁵ Letter to Poole of March 23, 1801.

¹⁶ *Excursion*, iv. "Argument" (1814 ed.). In xii. A 121-37 of *The Prelude*, analytical reason is criticised for its lack of feeling. Wordsworth undoubtedly believed that feeling is essential to that profounder knowledge which is not to be obtained by analytical reason. See pp. 139-41 above.

¹⁷ Pascal, *Pensées*, iv. 277.

¹⁸ Wordsworth, 1903, p. 60.

¹⁹ "Tintern Abbey," 65-85; *Prelude*, xii. 40-3, 140-7, etc.

²⁰ "Enough of climbing toil," 12; "Glad sight," 5-8; "To my Sister," 25-6.

²¹ xii. A 125-6. The "Ode to Duty" should also not be forgotten.

²² "One may well come to agree with certain great Asiatics, in contrast at this point with the European intellectual, that the good life is not primarily something to be *known* but something to be *willed*" (Irving Babbitt, *On Being Creative*, Boston, 1932, pp. xxxv-vi).

²³ *Political Justice*, 3 ed., 1798, I, 316-20, 444-9.

²⁴ xiii. 102-3, 138-9.

²⁵ "Tintern Abbey," 48; *Prelude*, iii. 150; "The Tables Turned," 19-20.

²⁶ xii. 57-60.

²⁷ "Presentiments," 4; so *Prelude*, v. 271-5.

²⁸ v. 151-2.

²⁹ A variant of viii. A 55-61; V variant of i. A 351-72; "Hart-Leap Well," 163-4 (note lines 133-6, 157-60 of this poem). For Wordsworth's animism see Chapter V.

³⁰ "Expostulation and Reply," 25-8; "Tables Turned," 25-8; *Prelude*, vi. 39-40; xiv. A 164-5, A 69, 71-3; "Poet's Epitaph," 51-2.

³¹ xii. 89-92, 109-23.

³² v. 285-6.

³³ Compare the sonnet beginning "Those old credulities," on the stories of early Rome disproved by Niebuhr:

in our hearts we know
How, for exciting youth's heroic flame,
Assent is power, belief the soul of fact.

³⁴ v. 228-9.

³⁵ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter IX (ed. Shawcross, I, 98). The italics and capitals are Coleridge's.

³⁶ *Excursion*, iv. 962. See below, ii. 203-32 n., 221 n.

³⁷ See *Biographia Literaria*, chapter X (ed. Shawcross, I, 109-10) and Shawcross's notes, I, 249-51, which assert that "Coleridge's earliest expression of the distinction" was in *The Friend*, numbers 5 and 9 (1809).

³⁸ xiv. A 264-5, 192. See pp. 35-6 above and 232-7, 362-4 below.

³⁹ "Weak is the will," 7.

⁴⁰ vi. 39-40.

⁴¹ "The Tables Turned," 26-32; "To my Sister," 24-6; pointed out by J. W. Beach, *The Concept of Nature in English Poetry*, New York, 1936, p. 195. Cf. also ("Essay, supplementary to the Preface," *Oxf. W.*, p. 944), "In the higher poetry, an enlightened Critic chiefly looks for a reflection of the wisdom of the heart and the grandeur of the imagination." Mr. Beach believes that "the heart" is used in something of this same sense in "Tintern Abbey," 122-3, but this is doubtful, as are most of the other instances (such as v. 382-4, xi. 287-91) that might be cited. See xiii. 217-20 n., 241 n., and Chapter II.

⁴² x. 464.

⁴³ xiv. 188-207, A 166.

⁴⁴ "When Philoctetes," 9-10.

⁴⁵ ii. 216-17.

⁴⁶ xii. 81-7, quoted on p. 131 above.

⁴⁷ "Desire we past illusions," 7-9.

⁴⁸ i. 341-50; iii. 116-24; v. 418-19, 597; ix. 234-5; xii. 81-7, 272-84; xiv. 285-7, 331-8; *Excursion*, i. 225 (immortality a mystery), 280-6 (in his youth

the Wanderer "was o'erpowered By Nature . . . by mystery and hope"); ii. 869 ("admiration and mysterious awe"); iii. 843 ("soul and sense mysteriously allied"); iv. 738-40 ("acts Of immortality, in Nature's course, Exemplified by mysteries"), 974-5 ("that superior mystery Our vital frame, so fearfully devised"), 1106-8 ("men from men Do, in the constitution of their souls, Differ, by mystery not to be explained"); vi. 362-3 ("through all stations, human life abounds With mysteries"); vii. 483 (light is a "mysterious comforter"); *Borderers*, 1529, 1795-6 ("this mysterious world"), 2154 ("Mysterious God"—so "Hermit's Cell," iv. 4); "Tintern Abbey," 38-40 ("the burthen of the mystery . . . Of all this unintelligible world"); "In desultory walk," 26 ("Diffused through all the mysteries of our Being"); "Glad sight," 3-4 ("The life of all that we behold Depends upon that mystery"); "Desire we past illusions," 7-9 (see above); "Armenian Lady's Love," 61-2 ("Wedded love . . . is a mystery"—so *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, III. xxvi. 12); "O blithe New-comer," 14-16 (the cuckoo "even yet" is "no bird, but . . . a mystery"); "Power of Sound," 108 ("these mysteries"); "Queen of the stars," 30 ("mysteries of birth and life and death"); "Humanity," 9-10 ("rocks and whispering trees Do still perform mysterious offices"); Knight, VIII, 227 (Michael "would draw out of his heart the mysteries And admirations that were there, of God And of his works").

⁴⁹ Observe that Wordsworth pictures the boys whom he admires as "full of Bending beneath our life's mysterious weight Of pain, and doubt, and fear" (v. 417-19) and is grateful that at school he was "compelled . . . to endure and note What was not understood, though known to be" (xiv. 331-6).

⁵⁰ *Oxford Lectures*, 1909, p. 134.

⁵¹ De S., 553 n. So it was with his interest in Druids; see iii. A 82-92 n.

⁵² Immortality Ode, 112; *Prelude*, xiv. 70-2, A 69-73.

⁵³ Shelley, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," 11-12.

⁵⁴ viii. 406-23.

⁵⁵ "Simon Lee," 61-8. Cf. Tennyson's "Flower in the crannied wall" and, for an attack on the ideas here presented, Irving Babbitt's *On Being Creative*, Boston, 1932, pp. 120-1. G. M. Turnell ("Dryden and the Religious Elements in the Classical Tradition," *Englische Studien*, LXX, 1935, 251) remarks that the mystery Wordsworth found in man stamps him as a romanticist, since the classicist found such mystery "only in the contemplation of God."

⁵⁶ vii. 626-49.

⁵⁷ ii. 386-418; iii. 127-35.

⁵⁸ De S. note to xiv. A 71; xii. 279. See also p. 3 above.

⁵⁹ "Nay, Traveller," 50-2.

⁶⁰ xii. 105-9, 146-7; contrast xii. 187, A 210.

⁶¹ "Alas! what boots," quoted in part on p. 135 above.

⁶² v. 287, 329, 358; xiii. 26-7; *Excursion*, iv. 991-2 (to some the universe is "no more than . . . a mirror that reflects To proud Self-love her own intelligence"); "Desire we past illusions," 7 ("conquering Reason, if self-glorified"); "Musings near Aquapendente," 337-9 ("Elate with view Of what is won, we overlook or scorn The best that should keep pace with it"); "Old Cumberland Beggar," 70-2 ("ye proud, Heart-swollen, while in your pride ye contemplate Your talents, power, or wisdom"); "St. Bees' Heads," 154-62 ("the Genius of our age . . . Boastful Idolatress of formal skill"). These references and those in the text I came upon by chance within a few days, there must be many more.

⁶³ xiii. 46-7.

⁶⁴ As Godwin showed, *Political Justice*, 3 ed., II, pp. 454-5.

⁶⁵ Legouis trs., pp. 310-14.

⁶⁶ v. 256-93; xii. 151-8.

⁶⁷ "A Poet's Epitaph," 55-6, 18-34.

⁶⁸ Letter to Elizabeth Barrett of February 8, 1846, printed in *The Correspondence of H. C. Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle*, ed. E. J. Morley, Oxford, 1927, II, 620-2, and in E. C. Batho's *Later Wordsworth*, pp. 70-1. Miss Batho also calls attention to Wordsworth's defense of Burns, "which goes very near antinomianism," and to the "enjoyment of lawlessness" shown in his praise of Rob Roy. See likewise *Recluse*, I. i. 703-25.

⁶⁹ "The world is too much with us," 9-14; *Excursion*, iv. "Argument"; "St. Bees' Heads," 154-62.

⁷⁰ R. P. Graves, *Life of W. R. Hamilton*, I, 311-14, quoted in E. C. Batho's *The Later Wordsworth*, p. 30.

⁷¹ Fenwick note to *The Excursion* (Grosart, III, 210).

⁷² Letter to Taylor of April 24, 1818. For a number of similar utterances on Keats's part see *Philological Quarterly*, XIV (October, 1935), 296-7.

⁷³ Letter to Sterling of October 20-22, 1831 (*Letters of John Stuart Mill*, ed. H. S. R. Elliot, 1910, I, 10-16); quoted in E. C. Batho's *Later Wordsworth*, pp. 13-15. See also pp. 127-8 above.

⁷⁴ See I. A. Richards, *Science and Poetry*, New York, 1926, pp. 61-4.

⁷⁵ J. Shawcross, speaking of Coleridge, in the Introduction to his edition of the *Biographia Literaria*, I, lxxxvii.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MYSTIC EXPERIENCE

When thy ambitious *knowledge* would attempt
So *high a Taske* as God, she must exempt
All carnall *sense*; Thy *Reason* must release
Her *pow'r*; Thy *Fancy* must be bound to th' peace;
Thy *Spirits* must be rapt; They must exile
Thy *flesh*, and keepe a *Sabbath* for a while;
Thou must *forget* thy selfe, and take strong *Bands*
Of thy owne Thoughts, and shake eternall hands
With thy rebellious *Lusts*; discard and cleare
Thy heart of all *Ideas*.

Quarles, "On our Meditation upon God"

When all the shores of knowledge fade . . .
When the quick stir of thought is stayed
And, as a dream of yesterday,
The bonds of striving fall away:
There dawns sometimes a point of fire.

Anonymous, "A Ballade of the Centre"

I was not more than eighteen when an inner and esoteric meaning began to come to me from all the visible universe, and indefinable aspirations filled me. . . . I was sensitive to all things, to the earth under, and the star-hollow round about; to the least blade of grass, to the largest oak. They seemed like exterior nerves and veins for the conveyance of feeling to me. Sometimes a very ecstasy of exquisite enjoyment of the entire visible universe filled me.

Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart*, chapter xii

"IN childhood," Wordsworth told Miss Fenwick, ". . . I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. At that time I was afraid of such processes. In later periods of life

I have deplored, as we have all reason to do, a subjugation of an opposite character, and have rejoiced over the remembrances, as is expressed in the lines, 'Obstinate questionings,' &c."¹ These memorable words make clear that Wordsworth was from his early years accustomed to trance-like states of consciousness. A similar experience but with interesting differences is described in the account of early morning walks at Hawkshead:

Oft in these moments such a holy calm
 Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes
 Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
 Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
 A prospect in the mind. (ii. 348-52)

Something like this happened to the Wanderer in his youth:

What soul was his, when, from the naked top
 Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
 Rise up, and bathe the world in light! He looked—
 Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth
 And ocean's liquid mass, in gladness lay
 Beneath him:—Far and wide the clouds were touched,
 And in their silent faces could he read
 Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
 Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
 The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
 All melted into him; they swallowed up
 His animal being; in them did he live,
 And by them did he live; they were his life.
 In such access of mind, in such high hour
 Of visitation from the living God,
 Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired. . . .
 Such intercourse was his, and in this sort
 Was his existence oftentimes *possessed*.

(*Excursion*, i. 198-221)

Presumably this is an incident from Wordsworth's own life and the differences between it and the experiences noted above are to be accounted for by the boy's development.² In the present case the external world fades from consciousness instead of appearing to be within it, and peace, joy, and exaltation replace the fear inspired in the school boy by the abyss of unreality. For this latter change we are already prepared by

the "holy calm" mentioned in the lines previously quoted. One reason for thinking this episode autobiographic is its similarity to an important event in the poet's first university vacation:

Magnificent

The morning rose, in memorable pomp,
 Glorious as e'er I had beheld—in front,
 The sea lay laughing at a distance; near,
 The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds,
 Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light;
 And in the meadows and the lower grounds
 Was all the sweetness of a common dawn—
 Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
 And labourers going forth to till the fields.
 Ah! need I say, dear Friend! that to the brim
 My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
 Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
 Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
 A dedicated Spirit. On I walked
 In thankful blessedness, which yet survives. (iv. 323-38)

Nothing is said here of the loss of awareness of the external world, but as this is mentioned in *The Excursion* (in what seems to be an account of the same incident) and in other descriptions of similar occasions, it is probable that the light of sense went out as the feeling of dedication descended.

Such was the case in an earlier experience of this same summer:

Gently did my soul

Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
 Naked, as in the presence of her God.
 While on I walked, a comfort seemed to touch
 A heart that had not been disconsolate:
 Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
 At least not felt; and restoration came
 Like an intruder knocking at the door
 Of unacknowledged weariness. I took
 The balance, and with firm hand weighed myself.
 —Of that external scene which round me lay,
 Little, in this abstraction, did I see;
 Remembered less; but I had inward hopes
 And swellings of the spirit, was rapt and soothed,
 Conversed with promises. (iv. 150-64)

Again on first entering London, probably later in the same year, the immaterial seems to have blotted out the material.

(How strange
That aught external to the living mind
Should have such mighty sway! yet so it was),
A weight of ages did at once descend
Upon my heart; no thought embodied, no
Distinct remembrances, but weight and power,—
Power growing under weight: alas! I feel
That I am trifling: 'twas a moment's pause,—
All that took place within me came and went
As in a moment; yet with Time it dwells,
And grateful memory, as a thing divine. (viii. 549-59)*

Both the exaltation and the partial loss of consciousness are mentioned in the descriptions of two other incidents of this kind. The first of these deals with an encounter with a very old, very poor, but uncomplaining leech-gatherer:

The old Man still stood talking by my side;
But now his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
And the whole body of the Man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
Or like a man from some far region sent,
To give me human strength, by apt admonishment. . . .

While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
The old Man's shape, and speech—all troubled me:
In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently.

("Resolution and Independence," 106-31)

The latest of these occurrences of which we have any account took place when Wordsworth was composing the sixth book of *The Prelude*, probably in April, 1804. He was describing his trip through Switzerland with Jones and, on coming to their discovery that they had actually crossed the Alps, something happened:

Imagination! lifting up itself
Before the eye and progress of my Song
Like an unfather'd vapour; here that Power,

In all the might of its endowments, came
 Athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud,
 Halted, without a struggle to break through.
 And now recovering, to my Soul I say
 I recognise thy glory; in such strength
 Of usurpation, in such visitings
 Of awful promise, when the light of sense
 Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
 The invisible world, doth Greatness make abode.

(vi. A 525-36)

In addition to these descriptions of specific instances, Wordsworth has left us two general accounts of such experiences, one of which, that in the Immortality Ode, he himself explained as referring to happenings of this kind:

Not for these I raise
 The song of thanks and praise;
 But for those obstinate questionings
 Of sense and outward things,
 Fallings from us, vanishings;
 Blank misgivings of a Creature
 Moving about in worlds not realised,
 High instincts before which our mortal Nature
 Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised.⁴

There is also the more definite account in "Tintern Abbey":

that blessed mood,
 In which the burthen of the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world,
 Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,—
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things.

(37-49)

When these scattered passages are brought together there can be little question as to their interpretation. Anyone who is

familiar with the literature of mysticism will recognize them as examples of those brief periods of ecstasy, insight, and oblivion to be met with in all races and all periods of history which are known as mystic experiences. True, not all the distinctive features of such experiences are found in each of the instances cited, but this was to be expected. Wordsworth was writing poems not case-histories; his descriptions are brief and are concerned with what the occasion meant to him, with the conditions surrounding it, the events that led up to it rather than with the event itself, about which he usually says little. Furthermore, an outstanding characteristic of the mystic experience is the difficulty of describing it. The person to whom it comes knows that something very wonderful has happened to him but cannot say what it is.⁵ If he tries he usually ends by interpreting instead of describing it. Often he resorts to figures of speech in the hope that they may suggest what it is beyond his power to tell. So it was with Saint Paul, "caught up to the third heaven . . . whether in the body, or out of the body" he could not tell, where he "heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."⁶ So it was with the "flight of the alone to the Alone" of Plotinus, and with Tennyson's

The mortal limit of the Self was loosed,
And past into the Nameless, as a cloud
Melts into Heaven. I touch'd my limbs, the limbs
Were strange not mine—and yet no shade of doubt,
But utter clearness, and thro' loss of Self
The gain of such large life as match'd with ours
Were Sun to spark—unshadowable in words.⁷

Emily Brontë, like many another mystic, sought to give a sense of what occurred by employing contradictory images, "mute music," "dawns the Invisible":

But, first, a hush of peace—a soundless calm descends;
The struggle of distress, and fierce impatience ends;
Mute music soothes my breast—unuttered harmony,
That I could never dream, till Earth was lost to me.
Then dawns the Invisible; the Unseen its truth reveals;
My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels:
Its wings are almost free—its home, its harbour found,
Measuring the gulf, it stoops—and dares the final bound.
(*"The Prisoner"*)

Accordingly, when Wordsworth tells us that he is unable to relate what happened during these moments of ecstatic emancipation he is only repeating what all mystics have said. "Alas!" he exclaims,

alas! I feel

That I am trifling: 'twas a moment's pause.
All that took place within me, came and went
As in a moment, and I only now
Remember that it was a thing divine. (viii. A 705-9)

The soul,

Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, whereto
With growing faculties she doth aspire,
With faculties still growing, feeling still
That whatsoever point they gain, they yet
Have something to pursue. (ii. 315-22)

Yet he does his best to convey an impression of what occurred. There was a sense of release—"the burthen of the mystery . . . the heavy and the weary weight . . . Is lightened"—and of being "made quiet by the power Of harmony, and the deep power of joy." The description of his feeling on first entering London, "A weight of ages did at once descend Upon my heart," must refer to the depth of the impression, not to gloom or the bearing of an added burden, for the moment was "a thing divine." Likewise in the lines about crossing the Alps when he writes, "I was lost . . . Halted, without a struggle to break through," he has in mind something not unpleasant but strange and wonderful—"visitings Of awful promise, when the light of sense Goes out." This last clause implies an almost complete loss of consciousness, which is also suggested in the account of the first entrance into London and in "Tintern Abbey":

the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul. (43-6)

Yet so complete an arresting of physical and conscious mental activity appears, as we have seen, not to have occurred in the

other instances. It is not mentioned in the description of the dedication, but this may be because the first reference to the boy's state of mind is in the words, "to the brim My heart was full"—which may indicate the return to consciousness. When narrating in *The Excursion* what may have been the same experience, Wordsworth tells us,

sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being. (i. 207-9)

In trying to describe what happened on another of these occasions he writes,

Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked, as in the presence of her God. (iv. 150-2)

The figure is significant since it is a favorite one with the mystics. For, as Dean Inge notes,

The mystical ascent seems to those who pass through it to be a progressive stripping off of everything that is alien to the purest nature of the soul, which cannot enter into the Holy of Holies while any trace of earthliness still clings to it. Hence the constant reiteration of such symbols as nakedness, nothingness and darkness.⁸

It will be recalled that Wordsworth frequently refers to darkness as a source of spiritual insight.⁹

A few lines after those just quoted Wordsworth attempts to tell what he gained from this experience:

I had inward hopes
And swellings of the spirit, was rapt and soothed,
Conversed with promises, had glimmering views
How life pervades the undecaying mind;
How the immortal soul with God-like power
Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep
That time can lay upon her; how on earth,
Man, if he do but live within the light
Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad
His being armed with strength that cannot fail.

(iv. 162-71)

Here one may well have doubts. Conceptions so definite as these are the product of the conscious mind and indicate that

on this cold, raw, but supremely happy evening either he advanced but to the borderland of the mystic experience, or only the "swellings of the spirit" and the sense of being "rapt and soothed" came to him at this time, the hopes, promises, ideas of immortality and of man's high powers being the result of later reflections on the experience. For,

Although . . . mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge . . . of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. . . . The fact is that the mystical feeling of enlargement, union, and emancipation has no specific intellectual content whatever of its own. It is capable of forming matrimonial alliances with material furnished by the most diverse philosophies and theologies.¹⁰

Like all mystics, indeed like all human beings, Wordsworth tended to see and interpret such periods of transcendent feeling in accordance with his habits, interests, customs, and knowledge,—to read into them his subsequent meditations on them as well as the conscious desires and thoughts which he had just before or after them. That is, however divine a mystic experience may be and however universal its significance, the recording of it and the interpretation of it (if any is offered) must be marred by the human, the fallible, the local, the individual in the recorder or interpreter.¹¹ The distortion is not serious in Wordsworth's case because he usually realized that he could neither remember what happened nor express what he felt at these times. When, as in describing the impression made by his first entrance into London, he uses the vague but suggestive figure, "weight and power,—Power growing under weight," no harm is done because we realize that it *is* a figure. But we may be misled by what he writes of another of these occasions:

I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit. (iv. 334-7)

Here Wordsworth seems to have confused the real experience, in which his will had no part, with his dedication of himself, which may have taken place shortly after the supreme moment

had passed or may have been a later interpretation of that moment.

None of the other periods of mystical exaltation was given a definite interpretation. Typical comments are:

How shall I seek the origin? where find
Faith in the marvellous things which then I felt?
Oft in these moments . . . a holy calm
Would overspread my soul. (ii. 346-9)

And now recovering [from the trance], to my Soul I say
I recognise thy glory; in such strength
Of usurpation, in such visitings
Of awful promise, when the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
The invisible world, doth Greatness make abode,
There harbours whether we be young or old.
Our destiny, our nature, and our home
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be. (vi. A 531-42)

That is, he had tapped a spiritual reservoir and strength flowed into him; the dry places of his soul were refreshed and blossomed anew. But, as he insists in the lines immediately succeeding those just quoted, there was nothing more definite.

The mind beneath such banners militant
Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward,
Strong in itself, and in the access of joy
Which hides it like the overflowing Nile. (vi. A 543-8)

So it was with the Wanderer:

Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
Rapt into still communion that transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him; it was blessedness and love!
(*Excursion*, i. 213-18)

There is no suggestion that what happened to Wordsworth on his first entrance into London brought him any message, and "Tintern Abbey" says only, "We see into the life of things." By this and by the "truths that wake, To perish never" of the Immortality Ode are primarily meant an overpowering sense of the reality and importance of the spiritual world.

Wordsworth describes in some detail how these occasions began as well as the circumstances which led up to them. Commonly they arose when the sight of some very impressive natural phenomena coincided with an unusual mood of his own. Nothing is said in the instance recorded in *The Excursion* of the Wanderer's state of mind, we are told only of a glorious sunrise; but in the account of the same or a similar event during the poet's first long vacation we learn that he was returning home after a night of dancing and "slight shocks of young love-liking," doubtless thoroughly relaxed in body and mind—conditions much like those which were largely responsible for the deep impression made by the encounter with the discharged soldier. It may well be that as he reached some high point he came suddenly upon a view of clouds, sea, and mountains gleaming in the light of the rising sun, while

in the meadows and the lower grounds
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn.¹²

At any rate, a scene of great beauty broke upon a sensitive mind which fatigue had rendered quiescent and peculiarly receptive to the freshness of the dawn.

At those times when he "would walk alone, Under the quiet stars" or "would stand, If the night blackened with a coming storm, Beneath some rock," it was presumably from the combined influence of nature and of the state of mind which had led him out into the night that the "fleeting moods Of shadowy exultation" came.¹³ During his first walk around Esthwaite after returning from Cambridge the provocative factors appear to have been a mind dissatisfied with itself and a scene associated with what was best in the boy's past, viewed with the fresh sight that absence gives. So in the encounter with the leech-gatherer, it was probably the "lonely place,"

the "pool bare to the eye of heaven," the "dim sadness—and blind thoughts" that paved the way for the memorable experience.

With the crossing the Alps and the first entry into London the case was different; nature seemingly played no part. For on the one occasion Wordsworth was riding through city streets and on the other the "visitings Of awful promise" came not during the journey itself but from the thought of it as he was writing fourteen years later.¹⁴ In each case the moving cause was an idea: that he made the famous crossing of the Alps, that he was actually in the world's metropolis. Yet it may be that in the former instance the memory of the beauty of the surroundings played some part. For in the familiar lines from "Tintern Abbey" it is to his recollection of the Wye valley that he attributes his mystic experience:

Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood . . .

By "them" he means the "beauteous forms" of the country about Tintern, which he had visited five years before. It would accordingly seem that with Wordsworth "emotion [together with beauty] recollected in tranquillity" could give rise to the mystic experience.

We are told something as to how several of these experiences began. Usually, as we have seen, they started from sense impressions or from the memory of such impressions; but as they grew more intense the material world (or the memory of it), which had given them birth, faded from consciousness:

In such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world . . . (vi. 599-602)

Thus to the seventeen-year-old boy the song that all things sang was

Most audible then when the fleshly ear,
O'ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,
Forgot its functions, and slept undisturb'd. (ii. A 432-4)

So in his first walk round the lake during vacation: the familiar landscape had in the beginning worn the sweetness of a face we love, but as he went on and his soul put off her veil he saw but little of the scene that round him lay, and thereat was pleased.¹⁵ Again in later years when he met the leech-gatherer:

The old Man still stood talking by my side;
But now his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
And the whole body of the Man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream.

("Resolution and Independence," 106-10)

It was the same with the young Wanderer on beholding the sunrise: at first "his spirit drank The spectacle"; then "sensation, soul, and form, All melted into him; they swallowed up His animal being."¹⁶

In this last-mentioned instance we are told that before sensation and form melted, swallowing up the boy's animal being, he read unutterable love in the faces of the clouds. Such love was unquestionably part of the impression that some of these occasions left with Wordsworth; and it seems likely that it or some other emotion, perhaps deep rather than turbulent, was present at the beginning of the experiences and in part responsible for them. "Tintern Abbey" refers to the mystic experience as "that serene and blessed mood, In which the affections gently lead us on."

What is at first one of the most remarkable things about Wordsworth's mystical experiences is that he never thought of them as such. Indeed, there is no evidence that he had ever heard of the term or of the thing it designates, which is the more surprising in view of Coleridge's familiarity with Plotinus, Boehme, and similar writers. Presumably the mystic experience was at this time not clearly differentiated from other occasions of rapturous, idealistic emotion and insight, and its unusual nature was not understood. At least there is every reason to believe that Wordsworth did not associate his periods of ecstasy with mysticism and that he regarded them as differ-

ing only in degree from the joyous communion with nature that was often his. He never saw that the early morning walk when he became a dedicated spirit, the first sight of London when the weight of ages descended upon his heart, the meeting with the leech-gatherer, and the evenings whose setting suns brought a sense of something far more deeply interfused—that these occasions had anything in common that was not shared by his skating, bird-nesting, waiting for the horses at Christmas, or the times when “a lengthened pause Of silence . . . carried far into his heart the voice Of mountain torrents.” And perhaps he was right. There was much of the mystic in Wordsworth’s entire outlook on life. “Spells seemed on me when I was alone,” he declared; and “oftentimes . . . Me hath . . . strong entrancement overcome, When I have held a volume [of poetry] in my hand”; and “I grew up Fostered . . . by fear.” He was everywhere conscious of “the pulse of Being,” even in “the loose stones that cover the high-way”; he believed that there was a “universal power And fitness in the latent qualities And essences of things”; he felt that he belonged to a human nature which was “not a punctual Presence, but a Spirit . . . far diffus’d”; he was haunted by the “mysteries of being”; he conceived of the imagination as rising from “the mind’s abyss,” of the majestic intellect as “exalted by . . . whatsoe’er is dim Or vast in its own being,” or as a mind

That feeds upon infinity, that broods
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
Its voices issuing forth to silent light.¹⁷

This fundamental mysticism is most clearly seen in his communion with nature, for nature spoke to him of mystery, of infinitude, of Powers, Spirits, and Presences, and of “the one interior life That lives in all things.”

Oh! ye Rocks and Streams,
And that still Spirit of the evening air!
Even in this joyous time I sometimes felt
Your presence.

(ii. A 138-41)

When he and his companions rowed across the shadowy lake at twilight leaving one of their number blowing a flute, “

Oh, then, the calm
 And dead still water lay upon my mind
 Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
 Never before so beautiful, sank down
 Into my heart, and held me like a dream! (ii. 170-4)

So it is with most of the great passages in *The Prelude*; there is usually a suggestion, as we proceed, of the fading of the material world, which gave rise to the emotions, together with an increasing, joyous sense of "usurpation" or of being "possessed."

Such passages are likewise instances of the transforming power of the imagination. As Wordsworth conceived it, the imagination is primarily the faculty by which we see things as they are not seen by the senses and give them a significance which they do not in themselves possess. Indeed, with him imagination and the mystical point of view "are each in each, and cannot stand Dividually." Mysticism furnishes the impulse and imagination the means. So when hunting ravens' eggs,

While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
 With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
 Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky
 Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds!
 (i. 336-9)

So when as a boy he fled the spot where the murderer was hanged,¹⁸ the "dreariness" which "invested moorland waste, and naked pool" may be attributed to the imagination; but the words "visionary dreariness" imply that, to the man who recalled the scene, there was something in it suggestive of the times when he was laid asleep in body and became a living soul. He did not make the distinction. He did not see that in his greatest moments, when the light of sense went out, imagination had no part. For in telling what occurred when he came to describe his crossing the Alps he wrote:

Imagination! lifting up itself
 Before the eye and progress of my Song
 Like an unfather'd vapour; here that Power,
 In all the might of its endowments, came
 Athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud. (vi. A 525-9)

This was not, however, satisfactory and in revising the passage he pointed out that more than the imagination was involved, although he could not say what:

Imagination—here the Power so called
Through sad incompetence of human speech,
That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost. (vi. 592-6)

It should be observed that with Wordsworth both the workings of the imagination and the mystic experience started from vivid sense impressions, or the memory of them, and that both transcended them; that both led to a sense of the unity of all as well as to the exaltation of intuition and the belittling of reason; and that both were closely connected with nature. Furthermore, Wordsworth's explanation of what he meant by "the imaginative"—"that which . . . turns upon infinity . . . passages where things are lost in each other, and limits vanish, and aspirations are raised"¹⁹—reads much like a description of the mystic experience.

The nature of this experience was also obscured to Wordsworth by its similarity to the occasions when, on his way to school, he had grasped at a tree to bring himself back to reality. Such incidents, although they had prepared the way for later mystic experiences, had concealed from him the uniqueness of such experiences, since they had been of no spiritual significance and had accustomed him to see nothing unusual in a partial loss of consciousness accompanied by a sense of external things as inherent in himself. The distinctive character of his mystic states was also obscured by their having much in common with the times when he "felt the sentiment of Being spread O'er all." These occasions were marked by "bliss ineffable," by exaltation, by a sense of the divine, of unity, and by something like a trance. Indeed, one would take them to be mystic experiences were it not that they seem to have continued over a considerable period, to have been not so much a series of incidents as a state of mind. Wordsworth refers to them as "the time in which The pulse of Being everywhere was felt," as "that bursting forth Of sympathy . . . When everywhere a

vital pulse was felt"; he writes, "I, at this time, Saw blessings. . . . I was only then Contented, when . . . I felt the sentiment of Being." ²⁰ This intense consciousness of the one life, which came to him when he was seventeen or eighteen and was renewed during the first year at Cambridge, may represent a late stage in the development that perhaps started with the grasping at a stone wall while going to school and culminated in the entrance into London and in the dedication, both of which took place within a year (possibly two years) after the pulse of Being was first felt. If we are baffled it is not strange that he was misled.

There was, then, no deep gulf between Wordsworth's mystical experiences and other memorable incidents in his life. For one thing, two of the occasions we have discussed, the encounter with the leech-gatherer and the first walk round the lake during the vacation, do not seem to have been complete mystical experiences. Still less so, it would appear, were the times when he "would walk alone, Under the quiet stars" or stand at night "listening to . . . The ghostly language of the ancient earth," although here the mention of "visionary power" and of the soul's remembering how but not what she felt leaves one uncertain. Similarly, despite the marvelous things which then he felt and the holy calm of soul which made what he saw appear like something in himself, a dream, there was presumably little of the strength of usurpation during the early mornings when the boy sat alone upon some jutting eminence. Perhaps there was none at all on that evening when the mountain like a living thing strode after him or on the following days when his brain

Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams. (i. 392-400)

Yet there is more than a little similarity between this state of mind and that which Tennyson ascribes to the mystic:

Always there stood before him, night and day,
Of wayward vary-colored circumstance
The imperishable presences serene,
Colossal, without form, or sense, or sound,
Dim shadows but unwaning presences
Four faced to four corners of the sky.

("The Mystic," 11-16)

At least this incident shows that Wordsworth was predisposed to the mystic experience. Such a conclusion is certainly to be drawn from what often happened to him as he wandered the streets of London, conscious that every face was a mystery and oppressed

By thoughts of what, and whither, when and how,
Until the shapes before my eyes became
A second-sight procession, such as glides
Over still mountains, or appears in dreams;
And all the ballast of familiar life,
The present, and the past; hope, fear; all stays,
All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man
Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known.
And once, far-travell'd in such mood, beyond
The reach of common indications, lost
Amid the moving pageant . . .

[he saw a blind beggar bearing a paper that told his story],

And, on the shape of the unmoving man,
His fixed face and sightless eyes, I look'd
As if admonish'd from another world. (vii. A 594-622)

Here, one is tempted to say, Wordsworth approached the border-land that separates normal from ineffable consciousness, but the flash which reveals the invisible world did not come.

Some may be inclined to deny that the incidents we have been considering are mystical experiences because they contain no hint of communion with God. But such communion is rarely mentioned in mystical experiences which originate in nature.²¹ Only once does Wordsworth speak of it in his de-

scriptions of such experiences, and the nature of several of them is such that any thought of Deity seems unlikely. Obviously the boy who grasped at a wall to recall himself to reality and who "was afraid of such processes" was not communing with the infinite. Nor is such communion suggested in the "obstinate questionings Of sense and outward things" of the Immortality Ode. To be sure, Wordsworth speaks in "Tintern Abbey" of having felt in nature

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused, (93-6)

but this passage has apparently no connection with the lines earlier in the poem which describe the mystic experience. The encounter with the leech-gatherer brought a vision not of God but of the old man courageously wandering about the lonely moors; and the first entrance into London, as the figure "power growing under weight" suggests, called up a feeling of the greatness of the metropolis with its centuries of suffering and achievement. As for the time when he was halted in describing his Swiss tour, he says of it, "In such visitings Of awful promise" that reveal "the invisible world, doth Greatness make abode";²² and by "the invisible world" he means, not heaven, God, and the angels, but the realm of the supersensuous and ideal. Likewise a few lines later when he asserts, "Our destiny, our nature, and our home, Is with infinitude" he means that only the abiding, the transcendent, the complete can satisfy us. He is thinking not of Deity but of the glory and the greatness possible to the human spirit. On but one of these occasions in his own life does he mention God and then in a figure of speech: his "soul . . . stood Naked, as in the presence of her God." But the time of which he is speaking, an evening walk along Esthwaite, brought to him no sense of the Divine Presence but "inward hopes And swellings of the spirit"; he "was rapt and soothed, Conversed with promises."²³

This is not to suggest that such experiences were not in the highest degree spiritual; but that, since Wordsworth's vital religion at this time was the religion of nature and since (despite his belief in one spirit immanent in all matter) he seems rarely

in his communing with nature to have been conscious of a Divine Person, he seldom interpreted what happened to him at these times as directly connected with the Deity. He was intensely conscious of one life in all things, but this life he seems to have thought of as an impersonal force, not as God. He did not feel that he had been fused with the One or had had immediate apprehension of Him. Had he been a devout Roman Catholic, had he possessed a strong belief in the personality of God, it would have been otherwise.

Yet in his description of one of these experiences he speaks of it as a "high hour Of visitation from the living God," refers to "prayer and praise," and declares "his mind was a thanksgiving to the power That made him."²⁴ It is possible, since the incident is introduced to show how communion with nature leads to a vital Christian faith, that this passage was revised shortly before its publication in 1814 and thus represents the interpretation of the older, more orthodox poet. Yet the lines in *Prelude* IV that seem to be another account of the same incident speak of "vows . . . made . . . bond . . . given, . . . A dedicated Spirit,"—expressions that are in accord with a sense of "visitation from the living God." Then, too, although in "Tintern Abbey" the "sense sublime Of something far more deeply interfused" is not connected with the times when "we are laid asleep In body," such connection may have been intended. There is, therefore, a fair probability that some of Wordsworth's mystic experiences were marked by consciousness of Deity.

It seems likely that these experiences had no definite beginning but were a development from the trance-like states of boyhood and the somewhat later periods of joyous consciousness of one life in all things. How long they continued we do not know for most of them are described in *The Prelude* (which was completed in 1805); the one narrated in *The Excursion* takes place in youth; and there is no reference to them in later poems. In his letters and recorded conversations, as in those of Dorothy and Coleridge, they are never mentioned. The latest of which we have a record probably took place in April, 1804, when he was writing for *The Prelude* an account of his

crossing the Alps. He was then thirty-four. This may well have been one of the last, for mystic and semi-mystic experiences furnished Wordsworth no small part of "the light Full early lost, and fruitlessly deplored."²⁵ If they had continued we should probably never have had the immortal "Ode" with its cry

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream? (56-7)

True, this lament is for the loss of joy, but the mystic experience *is* joy—not pleasure indeed, but, in Wordsworth's own words, "thankful blessedness." Of one of these occasions he writes,

If ever happiness hath lodged with man,
That day consummate happiness was mine,
Wide-spreading, steady, calm, contemplative.
(iv. 139-41)

But it was more than joy that he had lost; it was, to use his own word, "light."²⁶ And did he not write of these "fallings from us" as well as of our "first affections" that they

Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing?

This light did not mean knowledge or aught that may attest the mind's prowess but it did mean certitude, and hope, and peace, and love, and power. His mystic states were visitings of awful promise in which Greatness makes abode and in which he recognized the glory of his soul.²⁷ They led to that "dynamic integration of personality" which is one of the results of the mystic experience. "The usual insulations, which sunder our inner life into something like compartments, seem shot through. The whole being—in an integral and undivided experience—*finds* itself."²⁸ This unification of personality was accompanied by a joyous sense of the unity of all things.²⁹ For in the mystic state subject and object are commonly fused: "it is a monistic insight, in which the *other* in its various forms appears absorbed into the One."³⁰ So it had been in Wordsworth's school-boy trances: "I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed

with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature."⁸¹

Unquestionably Wordsworth's mystical experiences had much to do with the distrust of the intellect and with the intense consciousness of the mysteries of being which are marked features of his thought.⁸² They must have strengthened his faith in the reality of the unseen and deepened his conviction that the spiritual life is nourished chiefly through communion with nature. But they did more. There is reason to believe that much of the inspiration, the vision, the dynamic of Wordsworth's life was derived from these moments of transcendent ecstasy.

NOTES

¹ Fenwick note to the Immortality Ode. Wordsworth said much the same thing to R. P. Graves and Bonamy Price, see Knight, viii, 201-2. J. A. Symonds declared that he "disliked" the mystic experiences to which he was unwillingly but irresistably subjected (H. F. Brown, *J. A. Symonds, a Biography*, 1895, p. 29; quoted in William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York, 1917, p. 385. All references to James in this chapter are to this book. I should perhaps explain, since James's book is referred to more frequently than any other in the present chapter, that what I know about mysticism is derived primarily from the works of Evelyn Underhill, J. H. Leuba, Dean Inge, and Rufus M. Jones. It was not until after I had finished the revision of this chapter, six years after it was originally written, that I read *Varieties of Religious Experience* and found in it much the best treatment that I know of Wordsworth's kind of mystic experience.).

² It is carefully pointed out in *The Excursion*, i. 197, that the episode belongs not to the boyhood but the youth of the Wanderer. The similar experience described in *Prelude*, iv. 307-38 (see below) came to Wordsworth when he was eighteen.

³ Dr. R. M. Bucke describes a somewhat similar experience that happened to him as he drove in a hansom to his city lodgings (*Cosmic Consciousness*, Philadelphia, 1901, pp. 7-8; quoted in James, p. 399). James does not stress loss of consciousness of the external world as a feature of mystical states, and in one of the instances he cites the subject of the experience declares, "the scene around me stood out more clearly, and as if nearer to me than before, by reason of the illumination in the midst of which I seemed to be placed" (J. Trevor, *My Quest for God*, 1897, p. 268; James, p. 397).

⁴ Immortality Ode, 143-51. See pp. 155-6 above.

⁵ William James mentions as the first of the characteristics which distinguish the mystic state that "the subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words" (p. 380, cf. 405-407).

⁶ II *Corinthians*, xii. 2-4.

⁷ Plotinus, Sixth Ennead, ix. 11; Tennyson, "The Ancient Sage," 232-8; cf. *In Memoriam*, xcv, stanzas 9-11; "Two Voices," 304-6, 379-84; "The Mystic," 11-24; Alfred Lord Tennyson, *A Memoir by his Son*, 1897, I, 320.

⁸ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, fourteenth edition, article "Plotinus."

⁹ See v. 598 and n.

¹⁰ James, pp. 380, 425.

¹¹ This is the belief of the Roman Catholic Church: "Even when absolutely genuine and coming from God, a private revelation may be unconsciously wrought upon, added to or distorted by the recipient's own bias of mind and imagination" (Dom. S. Louismet, *Mysticism True and False*, New York, 3 ed., 1924, pp. 20-21. See also *The Spiritual Life, a Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* by Adolphe Tanquerey, translated by Herman Branderis, Tournai, 1932, pp. 707-8, which was called to my attention by Father Edwin Ryan.).

¹² iv. 307-38. The usual interpretation of this passage, that it represents Wordsworth's dedication to poetry, is discussed on pp. 365-6 below.

¹³ ii. 302-22.

¹⁴ See below, vi. 592-616 n.

¹⁵ iv. 137-62, A 150.

¹⁶ *Excursion*, i. 206-9.

¹⁷ iii. 232; v. 161-3; i. 301-2; viii. A 626; iii. 131; ii. 324-6; viii. A 760-3; xii. 85; vi. 592-4; xiv. A 71-3, 67-73. Cf. pp. 141-6 above.

¹⁸ xii. 225-61.

¹⁹ Letter of January 21, 1824.

²⁰ viii. A 625-6, 478-80; ii. 394-401. These occasions also reveal Wordsworth's fundamental mysticism, since "the thought that is most intensely present with the mystic is that of a supreme, all-pervading, and indwelling power, in whom all things are one" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, article "Mysticism").

²¹ See William James, chapters xvi and xvii, especially pp. 394-6, 425; J. E. Mercer, *Nature Mysticism*, 1913; Amiel, *Journal Intime* for 28 April, 1852; Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* and author's note; Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart* (1883), especially chapters v, xii; Whitman, "Song of Myself," section 5, *Democratic Vistas* (*Prose Works*, Philadelphia, 1897, pp. 233-4), "Hours for the Soul" and "Carlyle from American Points of View," in *Specimen Days* (*ibid.*, 118-19, 174), see also Rufus M. Jones, "The Mystical Element in Walt Whitman," in *Some Exponents of Mystical Religion*, New York, 1930, pp. 176-208.

²² vi. A 533-6.

²³ iv. 150-64.

²⁴ *Excursion*, i. 211-18.

²⁵ "Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour," 73-4. J. A. Symonds wrote, "This trance recurred with diminishing frequency until I reached the age of twenty-eight" (H. F. Brown, *J. A. Symonds*, p. 31; quoted by James, p. 386). Apparently such fading of mystical power is fairly common and might be more so if many mystics did not die young.

²⁶ See the quotation from "Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour" given just above.

²⁷ vi. A 531-6.

²⁸ R. M. Jones, "Mysticism (Introductory)," in Hastings's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ix, 84. William James writes of the mystic states he induced in himself by inhaling nitrous oxide: "They all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity" (p. 388).

²⁹ See ii. 221 n.

³⁰ James, p. 389.

³¹ Fenwick note to Immortality Ode.

³² See Chapter vii and pp. 141-6 above. "They [mystical states] break down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith" (James, p. 423).

CHAPTER IX

RELIGION

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II, I

She [Earth] being Spirit in her clods,
Footway to the God of Gods.

Meredith, "The Woods of Westermain"

What I sh[ould] myself most value in my attempts, viz the spirituality with which I have endeavored to invest the material Universe, and the moral relation under which I have wished to exhibit its most ordinary appearances.

Wordsworth to Henry Reed, July 1, 1845

The Unity of all existence is a fundamental doctrine of Mysticism. God is in all, and all is in God. "His centre is everywhere, and His circumference nowhere," as St. Bonaventura puts it. It is often argued that this doctrine leads direct to Pantheism, and that speculative Mysticism is always and necessarily pantheistic.

Dean Inge, *Christian Mysticism*

WORDSWORTH was fundamentally religious. He craved worship, aspiration, uplift, a sense of awe, of unity, of permanence,—something outside himself that made for righteousness and exaltation. For him, to live meant

To think, to hope, to worship, and to feel,
To struggle, to be lost within himself
In trepidation, from the blank abyss
To look with bodily eyes, and be consoled. (vi. 468-71)

"The great thought By which we live" is "Infinity and God" and "the highest bliss That can be known" is "the consciousness" that one is "habitually infused" by the Deity.¹

He held a priestly conception of his office as poet,² speaking of himself as

compassed round by mountain solitudes,
Within whose solemn temple I received
My earliest visitations, (xiv. 139-41)

and as "a youthful Druid taught in shady groves Primaeval mysteries" and guided from an "invisible shrine within the breast." Of his childhood he wrote, "I worshipp'd then among the depth of things As my soul bade me."³

Yet until he was thirty-five or forty, there was nothing distinctively Christian about his thought. Throughout his boyhood and his great creative period the Bible, the church, the Christian conception of God, the personality of Jesus and His death on the cross appear to have exerted very little direct influence upon him.⁴ He believed in them, he accepted them as a matter of course but apparently without thinking much about them. To be sure, Coleridge referred to Wordsworth in 1796 as "at least, a *semi*-atheist" and noted in 1803 that he "spoke so irreverently, so malignantly of the Divine Wisdom that it overset me."⁵ It may be, therefore, that during his sojourn in France he imbibed some of the atheism and the hostility to the church which were rife during the Revolution. Yet in his account of the errors into which he fell at this time he says nothing of loss of faith; so late as May, 1792,⁶ he still intended entering the church; and the reason he gave later for not doing so was not intellectual doubt.⁷ Furthermore, his nephew says of this period:

His mind was whirled round and round in a vortex of doubt, and appeared to be almost on the point of sinking into a gulph of despair. Not that he ever lapsed into scepticism. No! His early education, his love of the glories and beauties of creation protected him from any approach to that. Yet at this period of his life, his religious opinions were not very clearly defined.⁸

It seems unlikely, therefore, that such doubt was ever vigorous enough to hold an important place in his thought for any considerable period. What he wrote of the Wanderer, that in his childhood he was "taught . . . a reverence for God's word, And an habitual piety,"⁹ was almost certainly true of himself,

and he presumably retained this reverence and something of this piety throughout his life. Yet it should be observed that in speaking of his early reading he says nothing of the Old Testament narratives, which have stirred many a boy.

The only reference in the account of the Wanderer's youth to established religious practices is not reassuring: during a glorious sunrise he had been

Rapt into still communion that transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise.

(*Excursion*, i. 215-16)

Clearly all that was vital in the religion of this deeply religious young herdsman came from nature, and, as his boyhood is an idealization of the poet's own, this is important. The difference between his attitude towards revealed religion and towards the religion of nature is shown in these significant lines:

Early had he learned
To reverence the volume that displays
The mystery, the life which cannot die;
But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.
All things, responsive to the writing, there
Breathed immortality, revolving life,
 . . . and there his spirit shaped
Her prospects, nor did he believe,—he *saw*.

(*Excursion*, i. 223-32)

Likewise revealing is a passage written for "Michael" in 1800 but later rejected:

in his thoughts there were obscurities,
Wonder, and admiration, things that wrought
Not less than a religion in his heart. (Knight, viii, 230)

When speaking of his own youth Wordsworth refers to "the spirit of religious love" in which he "walked with Nature," to the "holy calm" that overspread his soul in the woods,¹⁰ and, more explicitly:

When I began in youth's delightful prime
To yield myself to Nature, when that strong
And holy passion overcame me first . . . (x. 416-18)

During these Hawkshead days the most powerful element in his religion was almost certainly animism, his instinctive faith that Spirits, Beings, or Presences inhabit certain places or objects and have a fostering care for human beings. This belief was important because it threw a religious coloring over his feeling for the external world, bound his religion closely to that world, and gave him a sense of being surrounded on all sides by spirit, by the divine. When his seventeenth year was come there developed, presumably from the animism (for it "had been gradually prepar'd"),¹¹ a joyous consciousness not only of individual Spirits in certain places but of one spirit pervading all things. The feeling reappeared during the first year at Cambridge but its rapturous intensity must soon have faded, leaving a fixed belief in the immanence of spirit in all nature. Some form of animism also remained, although it was rarely mentioned in later years and undoubtedly lost much of its vitality.

The religion of nature culminated for Wordsworth in his mystic or quasi-mystic experiences. These, it will be recalled, were almost always associated with sunrise or twilight, with mountains and woods, the lake or the sea, and did not appear to him different in kind from his other periods of delight in the external world. But they meant much more than delight; they were occasions of supreme exaltation, of insight, of dedication, from which his soul

retain[ed] an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, whereto
With growing faculties she [did] aspire. (ii. 315-19)

Indeed they were presumably with him as with other mystics the great dynamic of his spiritual life. Hence the very altar of the temple in which he worshipped was reared among the mountains and by the woods and streams.

It will be recalled that in Wordsworth's accounts of his mystic experiences he seldom mentions the Deity, that in these supreme moments he seems not, as a rule, to have had a sense of the Divine Presence. Of the feelings called forth by his crossing the Alps he writes:

in such strength
 Of usurpation, in such visitings
 Of awful promise, when the light of sense
 Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
 The invisible world, doth Greatness make abode. . . .
 Our destiny, our nature, and our home
 Is with infinitude, and only there. (vi. A 532-9)

"Infinitude" and "The invisible world" point to the spiritual significance of the event but do not suggest the consciousness of a personal God.

It is the same with his less exalted intercourse with nature: he rarely speaks of being conscious of God in the external world. In his descent from the Alps woods, waterfalls, drizzling crags, and clouds

Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;
 Characters of the great Apocalypse,
 The types and symbols of Eternity,
 Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.
 (vi. 624-40)

Here we have the conviction of the unity underlying all phenomena and of the external world as a revelation of the Deity, but no feeling of the presence of God. The "Wisdom and Spirit of the universe" passage speaks of feeling and thought as purified and sanctified, not until we are raised to communion with the divine, but "until we recognise A grandeur in the beatings of the heart."¹² Likewise the references to walks alone under the quiet stars or at the first gleam of dawn mention "an elevated mood," "visionary power," and "holy calm"¹³ but do not imply a sense of the closeness of the Deity. So with the other memorable incidents in the first two books of *The Prelude*,—snaring woodcocks, bird-nesting, rowing, skating, flying kites, riding horseback, watching the moonlight on the sea, or listening to the sound of a flute across the lake,—there is joy, a sense of beauty and of mystery, often there is uplift, but no communion with a higher power. It was the voice not of God but of mountain torrents that was carried far into the heart of the boy of Winander. The "spots of time" possessed a vivifying virtue and showed that the mind is

lord and master but brought no vision of the divine; the phrase, "visitings Of the Upholder of the tranquil soul,"¹⁴ was not used in connection with external nature. The distinction between a sense of the invisible world, infinity, and the like and a consciousness of God may seem to be trivial, even verbal, yet Wordsworth himself makes it. Speaking of the Swiss peasant he writes that at times,

To viewless realms his Spirit towers amain,
Beyond the senses and their little reign.
And oft, when pass'd that solemn vision by,
He holds with God himself communion high,
When the dread peal of swelling torrents fills
The sky-roof'd temple of the eternal hills.¹⁵

Holding communion with God is here referred to as a thing quite distinct from being transported to viewless realms.

In the lines just quoted, Wordsworth does connect nature and the consciousness of the Deity. Such passages are rare; I recall only two others: the mystic experience attributed to the Wanderer¹⁶ and the mention in "Tintern Abbey" of a "presence that disturbs . . . with the joy Of elevated thoughts . . . Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns." There must be other utterances of this kind, but in view of the great body of Wordsworth's writings, prose as well as verse, their number is surprisingly small.

This "Tintern Abbey" passage comes in the course of an account of the development of Wordsworth's feeling for nature. The poet asserts that he has now left behind him the aching joys of youth as well as the glad animal movements of boyhood and has reached a new stage, since he has "learned To look on nature, not as in the hour Of thoughtless youth." This new stage is distinguished from its predecessors by his consciousness in the woods and fields of "the still, sad music of humanity" and of

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused.

He does not make clear, nor do any of his commentators, wherein this last-mentioned feeling differs from that awareness

of "the sentiment of Being spread O'er all" which had come to him in his seventeenth year. Yet a difference there must have been, since the contrast between earlier and later attitudes is mentioned three times in "Tintern Abbey"¹⁷ and, as there are three accounts in *The Prelude* of the periods when the sentiment of Being everywhere was felt,¹⁸ this experience must have made too deep an impression to have been forgotten when "Tintern Abbey" was composed. It would seem, therefore, that in his seventeenth year Wordsworth felt merely that the universe was not a lifeless mechanism but was permeated by an impersonal force which vitalized all matter, whereas on his visit to the Wye in his twenty-ninth year he was aware of a Spirit possessed of personality who permeates not only all nature but the minds of men and who inspires elevated thoughts and sublime feelings. For Wordsworth such a Spirit was one who "wields the world with never-wearied love," who through pervading love unites man with the entire animate and inanimate creation. "The still, sad music of humanity" which he himself heard in nature must have seemed to him far more audible to the "presence . . . that impels . . . all objects of all thought, And rolls through all things."

It may be asked how the new consciousness of this personal presence in nature differs from the feeling Wordsworth had described to his sister in a letter of September 6, 1790: "Among the more awful scenes of the Alps, I had not a thought of man, or a single created being; my whole soul was turned to him who produced the terrible majesty before me." Here the answer is not difficult. In 1790 no thought of man disturbed the young traveller, whose remarks recall the self-conscious, religious raptures which mountains often inspired in eighteenth-century deists and pre-romanticists. The passage, which is unique among Wordsworth's utterances, sounds as if the future poet were repeating what he had read or had been taught in school. He speaks of the Deity not as an indwelling spirit but as a creator, and feels not love but awe. There is apparently no connection between this state of mind and that in which "the pulse of Being everywhere was felt."

It is common to refer to the belief that the divine spirit is everywhere present in the external world as pantheism, a term

seldom defined or clearly conceived. The idea of the immanence of God in the universe is, however, perfectly consistent with orthodox Christianity so long as there is no denial of His transcendence,—of his existence apart from the universe and his freedom from dependence on it. Pantheism is the belief that the universe is God or that He is a spirit permeating it but limited to it, so that if it were destroyed He would no longer exist. It is improbable that Wordsworth ever consciously held this faith, since there are references in the 1793 *Descriptive Sketches* and the early texts of *The Prelude* to a transcendent Deity.¹⁹ Yet in the poetry of his chief creative period (1797-1807) such references are rare, whereas mention is frequently made of a Spirit immanent in nature. One wonders, accordingly, whether the truth may not be that during his great years, Wordsworth believed in a transcendent God but seldom thought of Him, whether the vital part of his faith was not close to pantheism. So late as 1820 Coleridge—who, to be sure, had become extremely pious and orthodox—condemned his friend's poetry for its "vague, misty, rather than mystic, confusion of God with the world, and the accompanying nature-worship."²⁰

When a friend of Mrs. Clarkson's charged *The Excursion* with pantheism Wordsworth's reply was somewhat evasive:

She condemns me for not distinguishing between Nature as the work of God, and God himself. But where does she find this doctrine inculcated? Whence does she gather that the author of *The Excursion* looks upon Nature and God as the same? He does not indeed consider the Supreme Being as bearing the same relation to the Universe, as a watch-maker bears to a watch. In fact, there is nothing in the course of the religious education adopted in this country, and in the use made by us of the Holy Scriptures, that appears to me so injurious as perpetually talking about *making* by God.

This last sentence he enlarged upon by quoting a remark which his little boy made when the wind was tossing the fir trees, "There's a bit of him, I see it there!"²¹ Inasmuch as the later books of *The Excursion*, written 1809-14, clearly affirm faith in the transcendent Deity of the Christian church, Wordsworth presumably saw no need of touching on this subject and he may have thought it sufficient to point out that belief that nature is permeated by God is not the same as belief that

nature is God. Perhaps he intended to say that nowhere in *The Excursion* had he asserted or implied that nature is God, but he did not say this; he did not affirm that when he wrote the first book of *The Excursion* he believed in a transcendent Deity. It may be significant that neither here nor elsewhere did he make any explicit statement concerning his early beliefs, that in none of his letters or recorded conversations or pre-faces or poems did he declare that he had never looked upon nature and God as the same and had never in any of his writings implied that they are the same.

Since the accusation of pantheism was serious and frequently brought against him, it is strange that he did not defend himself by showing that passages which may seem pantheistic need not be so interpreted. Thus the familiar lines which speak of a presence in nature that disturbs with the joy of elevated thoughts might have been written by a pantheist or by an orthodox Christian who is conscious of God in the mountains and in the sunset. The same is true of the passage which declares that if all life on this earth (but not the earth itself) and all the works of man were destroyed,

Yet would the living Presence still subsist
Victorious, and composure would ensue. (v. 34-5)

The joyous experience of Wordsworth's seventeenth year when he saw one life in all things and "felt the sentiment of Being spread O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still" might be taken as pantheistic were it not for some added lines that strongly suggest a transcendent Deity:

O'er all, that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart. (ii. A 420-4)

This same suggestion, furthermore, is to be found in a later description of this experience: "Then rose Man . . . to a loftier height; As . . . by reason and by will Acknowledging dependency sublime." ²² The noble invocation,

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought,
That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion, (i. 401-4)

would naturally be taken as pantheistic if it were not for the second line, which may well imply a Spirit that transcends our universe. What seems to be the clearest expression of pantheism in Wordsworth is found in a fragment that he never published but wrote probably between 1798 and 1800:

The one interior life
That lives in all things . . .
—In which all beings live with god, themselves
Are god, Existing in the mighty whole,
As indistinguishable as the cloudless East
At noon is from the cloudless west. (de S., 512)

"Themselves Are god" may, however, mean no more than the phrase which follows it, "Existing in the mighty whole," that is, all things are part of God, who permeates and envelopes them. The small g of "god" may be of no more significance, since the lines exist only in a rough draft, than the capital E in "Existing." The possibility of reading too much into such passages may be illustrated from another fragment in which the "Soul of things" is invoked. This phrase, together with the lines immediately preceding and following it, would naturally be taken as a pantheistic address to the world soul were it not for the preservation of the lines which come before these and which make clear that the whole fragment is an invocation of "the Eternal Spirit, He that has His Life in unimaginable things."²³

Why Wordsworth neglected to explain to his friends that utterances like these were not pantheistic we do not know; it may have been from a consciousness that some of the passages *were* the expression of a pantheistic mood and from unwillingness to speak of the others lest embarrassing questions should be asked about these. For it is clear that, although he wished to accept the theological tenets of his co-religionists, he was unable to do so, and that he refrained from airing his doubts lest he should do injury to Christianity and the church, for both of which he cared deeply. In a sonnet which praises his wife's sober certainties on religious questions he confessed his own "fear That friends, by death disjoined, may meet no more";²⁴ in private conversation he "declared in strong terms his dis-

belief of eternal punishment" and "stated that the great difficulty which had always pressed on his mind in religion [was] . . . the inability to reconcile the divine [prescience] . . . with accountability in men." ²⁵ He even went so far as to say "I have no need of a Redeemer." ²⁶ Now one who felt no need of a Redeemer might well question the necessity of the Son's taking human form and suffering as a man,—that is, he might come to doubt the divinity of Christ. At least Crabb Robinson concluded Wordsworth's religion "to be like [that] of the German metaphysicians, a sentimental and metaphysical mysticism in which *the language of Christianity is used*." ²⁷ On January 17, 1836, Robinson noted that the ageing poet had "no difficulty in believing in miracles" but held "the idea of the personality of the Spirit" does not "claim so imperiously our adoption, as the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ." He found it hard to understand how the Infinite could find satisfaction in the sufferings of Christ or accept them as atonement for the sins of others; yet he asserted "the difficulty of comprehending the mysteries of the Gospel is no sufficient reason for rejection." The Athanasian creed he regarded as one of the "unhappy excrescences" which result from the "mischievous attempts at explanation" and precise definition. After recording these opinions Robinson added: "This I believe is all that Wordsworth can be said to believe, and it is little. It is quite clear that he does not place any weight in the historical evidence, and when I said that I tried to believe, he said, 'That is pretty much my case.'"

The conclusion to be drawn from all this seems to be that the most certain thing about Wordsworth's theological opinions was his uncertainty. In later years he tried to believe but even then he was, at one time or another, at least dubious as to several of the doctrines on which his church laid great stress. So far as his poetry is concerned the matter is not, however, important since throughout his creative period the vital part of his religion had been quite independent of the doctrines of the church or the meddling intellect and had owed far more to mountain solitudes than to the Bible. On May 28, 1825, he wrote Sir George Beaumont:

I never had a higher relish for the beauties of Nature than during this spring, nor enjoyed myself more. What manifold reason, my dear Sir George, have you and I to be thankful to Providence! Theologians may puzzle their heads about dogmas as they will, the religion of gratitude cannot mislead us. Of that we are sure, and gratitude is the handmaid to hope, and hope the harbinger of faith. I look abroad upon Nature, I think of the best part of our species, I lean upon my friends, and I meditate upon the Scriptures, especially the Gospel of St. John; and my creed rises up of itself with the ease of an exhalation, yet a fabric of adamant.

What this creed was he does not say but the letter suggests that it was brief, that it sprang from the heart, not the head, and that it was inseparable from nature. Yet it unquestionably failed to make clear what we should like most to know: Wordsworth's conception of the relation of God to the external world. This is a matter which he appears never to have thought out and regarding which he made assertions that are susceptible of various interpretations and are hard to reconcile with one another. Take, for example, his comment:

This Beast not unobserved by Nature fell;
His death was mourned by sympathy divine.
The Being that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep and reverential care
For the unoffending creatures whom he loves.

("Hart-Leap Well," 163-8)

Does this imply pantheism, or the immanence of the Deity, or what?

Mr. J. W. Beach in a recent learned and illuminating study²⁸ holds that such passages indicate the belief in a Universal Soul of the World, or Spirit of Nature, or *anima mundi* which pervades the universe and acts as God's agent in it. Mr. Beach thinks that Wordsworth derived the concept from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English writers. He points out that Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) was in the poet's library at the time of his death²⁹ and that there is a fair chance of his having read similar works or of his becoming acquainted with their ideas through Coleridge. This

belief differs from pantheism chiefly in that it includes a transcendent Deity and that the spirit in matter may be without self-consciousness and self-direction. The tendency of this conception is to divert attention from the Deity to Nature and to make of Nature a kind of Goddess, the director of the material world. Robert Boyle complained that men

ascribe most of the admirable things to be met with in it [the world], not to him [God] but to a certain nature, which themselves do not well know what to make of. 'Tis true, many confess that this nature is a thing of his establishing, and subordinate to him; but, tho' they own it, when they are ask'd the question, yet there are several, who seldom or never regarded any higher cause . . . whatever the words sometimes are, the agency of God is little in their thoughts.³⁰

This was said in 1686 but it might well have been written about Wordsworth. The reason for the development of this belief was the effort to explain motion and forces like gravity as well as the desire to avoid the conception, current in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that the universe is a vast machine, the order and physical laws of which were impressed on matter itself by the creator. Many scientists and philosophers of the time, including Newton, held that the "Principle of Gravitation"

must of Necessity be caused . . . by something which penetrates the very Solid Substance of all Bodies, and continually puts forth in them a Force or Power entirely different from that by which Matter acts on Matter . . . [and that the world] depends every Moment on some Superior Being, for the *Preservation* of its Frame; and that all the great Motions in it are caused by *some* immaterial Power, not having *originally* impressed a *certain Quantity of Motion* upon Matter, but *perpetually* and actually exerting itself in every Part of the World.³¹

Inasmuch as it appeared "Operose, Sollicitous and Distractious, and . . . not so Decorous in respect of God neither, that he should . . . set his own Hand, as it were, to every Work, and immediately do all the Meanest and Triflingest things himself Drudgingly,"³² the *anima mundi* of Greek philosophy was taken over as a kind of inferior goddess who did the actual work of exerting force in every part of the world.

As thus presented, the idea would not have appealed to Wordsworth; it would not have interested him. He was willing to accept ideas at which common sense balks so long as they seemed in accord with experience or instinctive beliefs, but this would have impressed him as merely speculative and theoretical, remote from reality. Yet something very like this did come out of his experience, since faith in the *anima mundi* is a kind of extension of his repeatedly-expressed animistic belief that there are Spirits or tutelary Powers who pace the solitudes and who must be conceived as acting under the direction of the Deity. Furthermore he frequently thought of nature as a Spirit endowed with personality, as a benevolent, purposive intelligence who animates and guides the external world:

Oh! soul of Nature, excellent and fair,
That didst rejoice with me, with whom I too
Rejoiced, through early youth . . .
Oh! Soul of Nature! that dost overflow
With passion and with life. (xii. A 138-47)

Nature by extrinsic passion first
Peopled my mind with beauteous forms or grand,
And made me love them. (i. A 572-4)

I had been taught to reverence a Power
That is the very quality and shape
And image of right reason, that matures
Her processes by steadfast laws . . . lifts
The Being into magnanimity. . . .

Above all
Did Nature bring again that wiser mood. . . .
(xiii. A 24-45)

The mountain shepherd seemed to him "a power, Or genius, under Nature, under God, Presiding." ⁸⁸ In the dark days of his slavery to analytical reason his only light came from things

Beyond the reach of human will or power;
The life of nature, by the God of love
Inspired, celestial presence ever pure. (xii. A 97-100)

As there would be no point in telling the reader that God is celestial and pure, the last four words must refer to nature and therefore imply that she is a spiritual being.

Here, however, as in the case of lines that sound pantheistic, Wordsworth's tendency to personification, to vagueness, and perhaps to metaphysical pathos⁸⁴ may mislead us into reading into lines much more than they were intended to mean. For example, when he writes that there

Dwells in the affections and the soul of man
A Godhead, like the universal PAN;
But more exalted, with a brighter train,
(“O'er the wide,” 2-4)

the perplexing phrase, “the universal PAN,” is apparently borrowed from Milton's description of Eden:

while universal Pan,
Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance,
Led on the eternal Spring; (*Paradise Lost*, iv. 266-8)

and the “Godhead” is the Christian Deity. Similarly, in the lines,

Descend, prophetic Spirit! that inspir'st
The human Soul of universal earth,
Dreaming on things to come,
(*Recluse*, “Prospectus,” 83-5)

“the human Soul of universal earth” seems to be a clear reference to the *anima mundi* until we learn from Wordsworth's note that the expression is from Shakespeare's cvii sonnet: “The prophetic soul Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.” There are also passages in *The Prelude* which strongly suggest the world spirit until the earlier or later texts are examined. For example, in the earliest manuscript of the fifth book, Wordsworth affirms that if the surface of the earth should be transformed by earthquake or fire

Yet would the vital spirit of her frame
Subsist victoriously and peace ensue.
(W variant of v. A 33-4)

A month or so later, when he came to write Book v as a whole he changed the lines to read, “Yet would the living Presence still subsist Victorious,” a reference presumably to the immanent Deity. As the two versions are separated by only a few weeks,⁸⁵ this is doubtless what was meant in the beginning, for the

orthodoxy of a later text may represent not a falsification but a clarification of the original meaning.

In another place it is the later text which suggests the *anima mundi*:

I believe
That Nature, oftentimes, when she would frame
A favor'd Being, from his earliest dawn
Of infancy doth open up the clouds,
As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
With gentlest visitation; not the less . . .
Does it delight her sometimes to employ
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable, and so she dealt with me.
One evening (surely I was led by her) . . .

(i. A 362-72)

This passage loses much of its apparent significance when one observes that the original reading of the second line was "That there are Spirits which, when they would form," and when one recalls that, in revising, Wordsworth regularly removed references to such Spirits. In other words, what appears to be a reference to the world-soul is an attempt to cover up genuine animism.

One of the passages which seems most clearly to refer to the world-soul is curiously like the description of the feeling that came upon him during his first year at Cambridge. In the last book of *The Excursion* he wrote, presumably about 1811:

To every Form of being is assigned . . .
An *active* Principle:—howe'er removed
From sense and observation, it subsists
In all things, in all natures; in the stars
Of azure heaven, the unending clouds,
In flower and tree, in every pebbly stone
That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,
The moving waters, and the invisible air.
Whate'er exists hath properties that spread
Beyond itself, communicating good,
A simple blessing, or with evil mixed;
Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
No chasm, no solitude; from link to link
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.⁸⁶

With this philosophical pronouncement compare the account in *The Prelude* of the feeling or conviction that came to the future poet in his seventeenth and eighteenth years:

To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,
 Even the loose stones that cover the high-way,
 I gave a moral life, I saw them feel,
 Or link'd them to some feeling: the great mass
 Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
 That I beheld respired with inward meaning.
 Thus much for the one Presence, and the Life
 Of the great whole. (iii. A 124-31)

Both passages assert that each object has an active principle, life, or feeling within itself and that at the same time each is part of a single "soul" which is termed "the Life Of the great whole" or "the Soul of all the worlds." Since there are two other references to the experiences of Wordsworth's seventeenth and eighteenth years, they clearly made a deep impression upon him, and may well have furnished the basis for the generalization in the passage just quoted from *The Excursion*. This seems the more likely in view of the lines, usually overlooked by those who cite the passage, which immediately follow in *The Excursion*:

This is the freedom of the universe;
 Unfolded still the more, more visible,
 The more we know; and yet is revered least,
 And least respected in the human Mind,
 Its most apparent home. (*Excursion*, ix. 16-20)

This comment recalls the conclusion of another of the accounts of what happened to Wordsworth in his seventeenth and eighteenth years: "Then rose Man . . . to a loftier height; As of all visible natures crown; . . . As, more than anything we know instinct With Godhead."⁸⁷

It is possible that by 1811 Wordsworth had learned of the *anima mundi*, had come to believe in it, and had interpreted his earlier experiences in the light of it. But if he is here referring to the world-soul it is to a different conception of it from that previously expounded as held by many seventeenth-century English writers. For this "Soul of all the worlds" is

not nature but a force which, although it circulates through all natural objects, has "in the human Mind, Its most apparent home." Like the presence described in "Tintern Abbey," which is likewise active since it "impels All thinking things, all objects of all thought," it dwells not alone in the light of setting suns, in the ocean, air, and sky but in the mind of man. It differs from that presence in being an impersonal principle or force, in not prompting to elevated thoughts and sublimity, and in being at times "with evil mixed."⁸⁸ The argument to the ninth book of *The Excursion* begins: "Wanderer asserts that an active principle pervades the Universe, its noblest seat the human soul.—How lively this principle is in Childhood." This last sentence hardly suggests the *anima mundi*. Wordsworth seems rather to have in mind an animating force which permeates man and the universe and unifies all, which is without self-consciousness, which is associated not with morality or spirituality but with the animal vitality of childhood, and which he apparently did not think of in relation to the Deity.

It is otherwise with the lines:

the sovereign Intellect,
Who through that bodily Image [the earth] hath diffus'd
A soul divine which we participate,
A deathless spirit. (v. A 14-17)

The force or principle referred to here is a "soul divine," which is diffused by the Deity through both nature and man. Seemingly it is not unlike the Holy Spirit conceived as a force rather than as a person. In the familiar invocation,

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought,
That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion, (i. 401-4)

the last two lines and the second half of the first line might well have been addressed to the *anima mundi*, but it would hardly be called the Wisdom of the universe or the eternity of thought. Wordsworth apparently had in mind the Deity considered less as a personality than as a vast creative and guiding intelligence.

Doubtless there were occasions when Wordsworth failed to distinguish between God and Nature (conceived as a spirit) or did not know which he had in mind; certainly there were times when he thought of the two as distinct;⁸⁹ but there is no place in which he clearly speaks of Nature as God's vice-regent in the material world, and some early lines which he never published seem, in opposition to this belief, to represent the Deity as acting directly on natural objects:

The Eternal Spirit, He that has
His Life in unimaginable things,
And he who painting what He is in all
The visible imagery of all the World
Is yet apparent chiefly as the Soul
Of our first sympathies. . . .

(de S., 508)

Any study of Wordsworth's religion must inevitably come to the conclusion that no formulation of his beliefs is possible. He was himself not clear about them; he did not follow up their implications or concern himself about possible inconsistencies. He felt differently at different times and expressed in his poetry the sincere feeling of the moment, which frequently was made up of vague aspiration and something approaching prayer or worship directed towards he knew not whom or what. Furthermore, the real belief of most persons, the vital part by which they live, probably varies not only from year to year, but from day to day. Their faith is not a unity, not a logical or consistent whole, but includes vestigial remains—superstitions, racial or folk inheritances, ideas learned in childhood but later repudiated—of which they are in the main unconscious. Most of the time these beliefs are dormant, but unusual circumstances call them quickly into life and they are acted upon or even expressed as if they were settled convictions, the normal faith of their possessor. Certainly it was so with Wordsworth. To-day he was an orthodox Anglican; to-morrow he felt there were spirits in the woods and lonely places; then again he was conscious of an infinite force pervading all things and all persons and unifying all. Often this force took on one or more of the attributes of personality, particularly love, until it ultimately became indistinguishable from the God

of the church in which the poet was reared. His strong, animistic tendency towards personifying natural forces frequently led him to think of nature as a Being who permeates and directs the physical world or the entire universe. At times he thought of this Being as apart from man, at other times as permeating man and thus almost, if not completely, indistinguishable from the immanent Deity, in whom his more orthodox thinking led him to believe. It is doubtful if between 1793 and 1807 Wordsworth gave much thought to God as the creator or as one who exists apart from man and the world which man sees. Still less heed, presumably, did he pay to the God of the Old Testament or of the Anglican Church of his day, or to the orthodox creed. In his later years he attached great importance to the church as an institution and tried, but with imperfect success, to accept its doctrinal teachings.

It is generally supposed that about the time of his brother's death, February 5, 1805, Wordsworth began to feel that the religion of nature was inadequate and turned gradually towards the support of revealed religion, the more orthodox belief of his later years. The "Ode to Duty" is thought to mark the beginning of the transition, although if such be the case the change must have commenced at least four months previous to the drowning of John Wordsworth, since there is good reason for ascribing "Duty" to September, 1804.⁴⁰ But there is no evidence that Wordsworth renounced the religion of nature, that he ever apologized for or wished to retract his glad acknowledgment of nature as the soul of his moral being, or such assertions as "Nature never did betray The heart that loved her," or

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

At times he may have desired to qualify such vigorous assertions, just as, in revision, he toned down many lines in *The Prelude*, but such qualifications were always understood. To be sure, the later years lacked the "visionary splendour" of

mystic communion with nature which had lit up the early period, but this did not mean any less devotion to nature or any loss of faith in the ministry of stars and waters.

Wordsworth's attitude did, however, change in two particulars: his rapturous delight in the out-of-doors abated and he came to feel that something more than nature was needed. The two are almost one. So long as he had been numbered among the Glad Hearts

who, in love and truth,
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth,

he had done the work of duty and known it not.⁴¹ But, like his sister, he aged rapidly. So early as 1798 he was troubled by the loss of youthful raptures,⁴² and four years later consciousness of the loss called forth the Immortality Ode with its cry, "Whither is fled the visionary gleam?" Three more years brought the departure of Coleridge and the death of John Wordsworth, which resulted in the marked diminution of vital spirits noticeable in the last books of *The Prelude*. His own dissatisfaction with this poem and consciousness of failing creative power were still more disheartening. As a result, he made the correction of despondency the central theme of *The Excursion* (1814) and in 1818 when recalling the raptures of childhood he wrote, "If a vestige of those gleams Survived, 'twas only in my dreams."⁴³ Married life brought him deep joy but it also brought domestic and financial cares and responsibilities, a crowded house, and much less freedom. His sister too was less free; he could no longer wander with her and Coleridge whenever impulse led, as in the precious years that followed the recovery from his disappointment in the Revolution.

The buoyant faith of those years, although much more than "the blind result Of cordial spirits and vital temperament,"⁴⁴ was partly that, partly the assurance of young manhood, and partly the confident optimism or rebirth. It was untried and, as the mystic visions which had thrown a magic light o'er hill and stream faded, as joy departed and cares and responsibilities came, it was found not to be enough. In 1838, thinking wistfully of his own youth he wrote:

Life with yon Lambs, like day, is just begun,
Yet Nature seems to them a heavenly guide.

("Life with yon Lambs," 1-2)

"Nature" here refers not to the outer but the inner world of instincts, sensibilities, affections; yet for Wordsworth both the inner and the outer nature were heavenly guides. He continued to believe in the supreme value of "passion" and of the ministry of the external world, but he had been steering his course by the sun and in dark days he needed other helpers. These were found in the rugged stoicism of his temperament, in duty, in revealed religion, and in the established institutions of his country. But while they yielded support they furnished little inspiration or dynamic. In revising *The Prelude*, passages that savored of pantheism were softened or suppressed and others of a smug, sanctimonious flavor were added, but such moving lines as

This I speak
In gratitude to God, who feeds our hearts
For his own service, knoweth, loveth us
When we are unregarded by the world, (xiii. A 274-7)

and

gentlest visitations of pure thought
When God, the Giver of all joy, is thank'd
Religiously, in silent blessedness (vi. A 613-15)

—such lines do not come from the later, more orthodox period.

Throughout his life Wordsworth exhibited great high-mindedness, unselfishness, kindness, generosity, and freedom from pettiness. Much of this nobility of character was probably due to the religion of his forefathers and friends and of those by whom he was surrounded as a boy. Little of it seems to have come from his own orthodox faith, which in his youth was perfunctory and in his maturity represented the crystalization rather than the growth of his thought. What was vital, dynamic, creative in his religion was associated with joy, with "passion," with mystery, with solitude, and most of all with nature.

NOTES

¹ xiv. A 183-4, A 107-11.

² See i. 52-4 n.

³ A variant of iii. A 82-93; xii. A 234-5.

⁴ The concordance shows that there are astonishingly few references to Jesus Christ and His cross in all of Wordsworth's poetry and (except for allusions to crosses seen near the Chartreuse) none at all in that composed before 1807. *Peter Bell*, 971-80, and *Excursion*, i. 932-9, were almost certainly added in revision.

⁵ Letter to Thelwall of May 13, 1796; *Anima Poetae*, 1895, p. 35, passage dated "October 26, 1803." Miss Batho, whose chapter, "Religion," is a sane correction of common misconceptions, points out that Coleridge probably did not mean what we should mean by "semi-atheist" and probably did not understand how much Anglican orthodoxy Wordsworth unconsciously accepted from his early training (*The Later Wordsworth*, Cambridge, 1933, pp. 264-70).

⁶ Letter to Mathews of May 17, 1792.

⁷ Crabb Robinson's Diary for May 31, 1812: "He declared himself not virtuous enough for a clergyman." He attended church at least once in 1793-4, see *Prelude*, x. 293-9.

⁸ *Memoirs*, i, 89.

⁹ *Excursion*, i. 114-16. The lines, "In sympathetic reverence we trod The floors of" the Chartreuse monastery, and the reference to "the cross of Jesus" (vi. 475-6, 484, both in A² and written probably in 1808, see de S., 539) do not indicate personal religion but responsiveness to places and symbols in which "men have . . . Humanly clothed, the ghostliness of things" (28-9 of A² variant of vi. 420 ff.; cf. vi. 450-61).

¹⁰ ii. 357-8, 348-9. In *Evening Walk* (1793), 329, he mentions the "religious awe" aroused by twilight.

¹¹ viii. A 624. The development here referred to is described in ii. 386-418; iii. 127-35; viii. 476-94.

¹² i. 411-14.

¹³ ii. 302-52.

¹⁴ iii. 119-20.

¹⁵ *Descriptive Sketches* (1793), 548-53. The meaning of the third line is clearer in the final text, "And oft, when that dread vision hath past by."

¹⁶ *Excursion*, i. 197-220; note especially 211-12, "in such high hour Of visitation from the living God." In the account of his first circuit of the lake during the long vacation he writes:

Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked, as in the presence of her God. (iv. 150-2)

But the lines are purely figurative (note the "as") and imply no consciousness of the Deity. The figure was chosen in 1804 and presumably not thought of in 1788.

¹⁷ "Though changed . . . from what I was" (66), "That time is past" (83), "I have learned . . . nature, not as in . . . thoughtless youth" (88-90). The last of these utterances and the view expressed in 73-4 that the second stage is an advance over the first make it unlikely that Wordsworth is speaking only of the difference between the second and the third periods of his development.

¹⁸ ii. 386-418; iii. 127-35; viii. 476-94. The first of these was probably written within a year and a half of the composition of "Tintern Abbey" (de S., xxxiv).

¹⁹ *Descriptive Sketches* (1793), 3, 487, 551, 792; *Prelude*, iii. A 143-4; v.

A 14-17, A 222; vi. A 154-7; vii. A 718; viii. A 392-4, A 435-6, A 835; ix. A 236-8; xii. A 99-100; xiv. A 266-8; de S., 508, lines 6-11.

²⁰ Letter to Allsop of August 8, 1820.

²¹ Letter to Catherine Clarkson of December, 1814.

²² viii. A 630-9. Wordsworth's feelings at the time may have been pantheistic; we have only the later picture of them.

²³ De S., 508.

²⁴ "O dearer far," 3-4.

²⁵ Crabb Robinson's Diary for January 5, 1843, and April 19, 1824.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, January 3, 1815, cf. May 24, 1812. These passages, which are in shorthand, were first printed by Miss Edith Morley in 1938; as they are relatively early, Wordsworth may have thought differently in later years.

²⁷ Diary for January 3, 1815, likewise first printed in 1938 from Robinson's shorthand. The italics are mine.

²⁸ *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry*, New York, 1936, chapter III. Mr. Beach's discussion of the *anima mundi*, to which I am greatly indebted, is much the best I have found.

²⁹ Yet it should not be forgotten that he wrote Wrangham on February 19, 1819: "My reading powers were never very great . . . as to old Books . . . (small and paltry as my Collection [i. e. library] is) I have not read a fifth part of it."

³⁰ *A Free Inquiry into the Vulgar Notion of Nature*, in *The Philosophical Works of Robert Boyle*, 1725, II. i. 107; quoted by Beach, pp. 67-8.

³¹ Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse concerning the Being and Attributes of God*, 1766, II, Prop. i, p. 14; quoted by Beach, p. 84.

³² Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 1678, chapter III, section xxxvii, paragraph 4; quoted by Beach, p. 59.

³³ viii. 258-60 (A 392-4).

³⁴ See above p. 6.

³⁵ De S., xxxvi-xxxvii.

³⁶ *Excursion*, ix. 1-15. The first eleven of these lines recall "The Old Cumberland Beggar," 73-9:

'Tis Nature's law
That none, the meanest of created things . . .
The dullest or most noxious, should exist
Divorced from good—a spirit and pulse of good,
A life and soul, to every mode of being
Inseparably linked.

If it were not for the similarity of this passage to that quoted above, one would take the last three lines as merely figurative, as meaning no more than There is good in everything (cf. 67, "But deem not this Man useless").

³⁷ viii. A 630-8.

³⁸ See pp. 194-5 above.

³⁹ The following instances are all from early texts of *The Prelude*: v. A 14-15, A 222; vii. A 718; viii. A 62-4, A 393-4, A 435-6, A 835; xii. A 99-100; de S. note to i. A 577-93.

⁴⁰ E. H. Hartsell in *London Times Literary Supplement* for May 30, 1935, and Nowell Smith, *ibid.*, June 20, 1935.

⁴¹ "Ode to Duty," 9-14.

⁴² "Tintern Abbey," 83-8. It is hard to realize as one reads *The Prelude* and the letters which its author and his sister wrote between 1804 and 1810 that they are the work of persons not yet forty.

⁴³ "Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour," 64-8.

⁴⁴ *Excursion*, vii. 312-13.

CHAPTER X

THE IMAGINATION

In the soul

Are many lesser faculties, that serve
Reason as chief; among these Fancy next
Her office holds; of all external things,
Which the five watchful senses represent,
She forms imaginations, aery shapes,
Which Reason, joining or disjoining, frames
All what we affirm or what deny, and call
Our knowledge or opinion.

Paradise Lost, v. 100-8

Judgment begets the strength and structure; and Fancy begets the ornaments of a Poem.

Hobbes, *Answer to Davenant's*

Preface before Gondibert

Poetry depends much more on Imagination, than other Arts, but is not on that Account less reasonable than they; for Imagination is as much a Part of Reason, as is Memory or Judgment, or rather a more bright Emanation from it, as to paint and throw Light upon Ideas, is a finer Act of the Understanding, than simply to separate or compare them: The Plays, indeed, and the Flights of Fancy, do not submit to that sort of Discussion, which moral or physical Propositions are capable of, but must nevertheless, to please, have Justness and natural Truth: The Care to be had, in judging of Things of this Nature, is to try them by those Tests that are proper to themselves, and not by such as are proper only to other Knowledges. Thus Poetry is not an irrational Art, but as closely link'd with Reason, exerted in a right Way, as any other Knowledge; what it differs in, as a Science of Reason, from other Sciences, is, that it does not, equally with them, lie level to all Capacities, that a Man, rightly to perceive the Reason and the Truth of it, must be born with *Taste* or a Faculty of Judging, and that it cannot be reduc'd to a formal Science, or taught by any set Precepts.

Leonard Welsted, *Dissertation concerning*

the Perfection of the English Language

One power alone makes a poet: Imagination, the Divine Vision.

Blake, *Annotations to Wordsworth's Poems*

It is the fashion of the day to lay great stress upon what they call "imagination" and "invention," the two commonest of qualities: an Irish peasant with a little whiskey in his head will imagine and invent more than would furnish forth a modern poem.

Byron, *Letter on Bowles' Strictures on Pope*

L'imagination est l'œil de l'âme.

J'appelle imagination la faculté de rendre sensible ce qui est intellectuel, d'incorporer ce qui est esprit; en un mot, de mettre au jour, sans le dénaturer, ce qui est de soi-même invisible.

Joubert, *Pensées*, III, xlvii, xlviii

The Imagination may be defined to be the use which the Reason makes of the material world.

Emerson, *Nature*, vi

THE imagination was not a discovery of the romanticists. The Greeks and Romans discussed it, as did medieval and Renaissance critics, and between 1660 and 1800 it became an important topic with literary theorists.¹ Addison's *Spectator* papers on the Pleasures of the Imagination enjoyed a great vogue; Akenside's poem of the same title was highly esteemed; and the numerous discussions of imitation and originality, of Homer, Virgil, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, and a host of lesser writers, were pretty certain to have something to say about genius, invention, and "fancy." These utterances, although of considerable historic interest, are valuable for the light they throw on the period rather than on the subject treated. They usually confuse the imagination with fancy and invention; they describe it as the passive faculty of calling up images and inducing readers to do so, or of conceiving the wild, the strange, the improbable. Accordingly they often oppose it to judgment and regard it as a dangerous faculty which needs curbing. Even Burke, so late as 1756, could write:

The mind of man possesses a sort of creative power of its own; either in representing at pleasure the images of things in the order and manner in which they were received by the senses, or in combining those images in a new manner, and according to a different order. This power is called imagination; and to this belongs whatever is called wit, fancy, invention, and the like. But it must be observed, that this power of the

imagination is incapable of producing any thing absolutely new; it can only vary the disposition of those ideas which it has received from the senses.²

But if the romanticists did not discover the imagination they discovered the meaning which it has for serious criticism today. It was not, however, with a poet or critic that this meaning originated but apparently with the greatest of modern philosophers, Kant. He it was who first made clear that in acquiring knowledge of the external world the mind is not passive, as had been thought, but active and creative, and that the primary creative activity in perception belongs to the imagination.³ These ideas or something like them—for Kant's conception of the imagination is by no means clear—Coleridge seems to have found in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, to have developed but never fully expounded, and, in the course of extended discussions, to have passed on to his friend. He does not, it is true, suggest that he owed anything to Kant in this matter but he was inclined to be reticent about his debt to the Germans. He does assert that it was he, not Wordsworth, who began the investigation of the subject and that, although Wordsworth assisted, the conclusions he reached were in the main his own.⁴ This seems highly probable in view of his knowledge of Kant and of his being much more philosophically minded, more interested in abstract questions, than his friend. Not that Wordsworth merely accepted Coleridge's theory. He was far too independent, too self-confident, to take such a course in a matter of fundamental importance to his art and one in which he himself had extensive experience. In his preface of 1815, for example, he criticized Coleridge's characterization of fancy as "the aggregative and associative power" for being "too general." "To aggregate and to associate," he remarked, "to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy; but either the materials evoked and combined are different; or they are brought together under a different law, and for a different purpose."⁵

This sounds as if Wordsworth were by no means a tame disciple but had given the question a good deal of independent thought. One would expect as much from the interest in

psychology displayed in his early verse. As a matter of fact it was he who wrote the first and fullest discussion of the subject, for the treatment of it in *The Prelude* (composed between 1798 and 1805) anticipates by more than a decade, some of it by almost two decades, the all-important but brief and scattered comments on the topic in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817). No self-respecting person would devote a long, important work to the presentation of the ideas of another man who has not yet made them known. Wordsworth might, to be sure, have been deceived into thinking the ideas were his own, but if so why did not Coleridge protest? For the plan and purpose of *The Prelude* were discussed with him; he read the poem as it was being composed; he gave it his enthusiastic and reverent approval when it was completed. Furthermore, we have an unusually full record of Coleridge's doubts, morbid suspicions, and complaints but none of them refer to Wordsworth's having taken over his ideas. On the contrary he declares that it was the imagination displayed in Wordsworth's *Guilt and Sorrow* which led to his investigation of the faculty;⁶ he gratefully acknowledges "the advantage . . . of frequent conversation" with Wordsworth on the subject, and the lucidity which his own conclusions in this matter had gained from "many happy instances drawn [by Wordsworth] from the operation of natural objects on the mind."⁷ So far as can be learned from Coleridge's scattered remarks, he agreed even as to details with what his friend said on this theme. Certainly if there had been any marked disagreement it would have been expressed in the *Biographia Literaria*, in the note-books, the marginalia, the letters, or in the recorded conversations.

This revolutionary conception of the imagination, which Coleridge probably derived from Kant and which he developed with some assistance from Wordsworth, is the theme of *The Prelude*. It is so because *The Prelude* traces the "Growth of a Poet's Mind" and the imagination is, in its author's words, "the faculty which is the primum mobile in Poetry."⁸ To Crabb Robinson he remarked: "Whatever is addressed to the imagination is essentially poetical, but very pleasing verses deserving all praise, but not so addressed, are not poetry."⁹ Thus it is that *The Prelude* is largely devoted to experiences, in

themselves often trivial, which have been made significant by the imagination.

A striking feature of this new conception is that the imagination is by no means limited to poets and artists. It is as universal and as commonly used as any faculty, since it enters into all perception and is therefore employed by every person almost every moment, even in the most ordinary and utilitarian acts. Wordsworth expounds this doctrine in the second book of *The Prelude*, where he traces the beginning of the imagination to the babe at the breast:

Emphatically such a Being lives,
An inmate of this *active* universe;
From nature largely he receives; nor so
Is satisfied, but largely gives again,
 . . . his mind,
Even as an agent of the one great mind,
Creates, creator and receiver both. (ii. A 265-73)

" Even [in the first trial of its powers] " the infant

Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine
In one appearance, all the elements
And parts of the same object, else detach'd
And loth to coalesce. (ii. A 246-50)

That is, our perception of so simple an object as a single chair or table is not given to us by the senses. What they give is patches of color, smoothness of surface, a sense of resistance to pressure, of weight, temperature, and the like; yet when we glance at or touch the chair we perceive an object, a thing, a unity to which we relate the qualities derived from sense impressions. In other words when we think of the everyday world of concrete objects, commonplace or wonderful, we are not thinking of mere sense impressions but of those impressions as they have been unified, arranged, and interpreted by the imagination.

This unifying and interpreting power, which all persons possess, is termed by Coleridge "the primary imagination"; the higher gift, which is by no means common, he calls "secondary." His all-too-brief characterization of this faculty

constitutes one of his chief contributions to esthetics and literary criticism:

The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as objects*) are essentially fixed and dead.¹⁰

The secondary imagination, that which distinguishes poets, artists, and scientists, is then like the primary except that it is more powerful, that it is consciously directed by its possessor, and that it breaks down the work of the primary imagination (the ordinary, everyday perceptions of the external world) in order to re-create it. There is nothing here that is not implicit in what Wordsworth writes, but several things are brought out more clearly and with different emphasis than in the comments of Wordsworth, just as he in turn made a number of points with which his more philosophic friend doubtless agreed but which he did not mention.

For both men the heart of the matter lay in the transforming power of the imagination: "It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create." "The imagination," Wordsworth told his nephew, "is that intellectual lens through the medium of which the poetical observer sees the objects of his observation, modified both in form and colour." It is "lord Of observations natural."¹¹

[It] has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws. . . . Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch. . . . Directly the reverse of these, are the desires and demands of the Imagination. She recoils from everything but the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite.¹²

The appropriate business of poetry . . . and her *duty*, is to treat of things not as they *are*, but as they *appear*; not as they exist in themselves, but as they *seem* to exist to the *senses*, and to the *passions*.¹³

Here [in London] then my young imagination found
 No uncongenial element; could here
 Among new objects serve or give command,
 Even as the heart's occasions might require.

(viii. 639-42)

Wordsworth recognized a symbol of the imagination in what he saw and heard by moonlight on Mount Snowdon, inasmuch as "the face of outward things" had there been "moulded, joined, abstracted, . . . endowed with interchangeable supremacy" by Nature, just as it is by higher (that is, by imaginative) minds:

They from their native selves can send abroad
 Like transformations, for themselves create
 A like existence, and, where'er it is
 Created for them, catch it by an instinct. (xiv. A 93-6)

In these lines Wordsworth is thinking of the higher kind of creation, to which Shelley refers when he asserts that only God and the poet can create.¹⁴ It is creation in this sense of the term that Wordsworth has in mind when he belittles taste and merely accurate observation of nature as passive, and when he writes, "the interest which objects in nature derive from the predominance of certain affections . . . is poetic, and essentially poetic, and why? because it is creative."¹⁵ So, too, when he speaks with awe of "the creation (by no lower name Can it be called)" which is achieved through the wedding of the mind of man to the external world by the imagination, and when he refers to poetry of the higher kind, in which "life and nature are described as operated upon by the creative or abstracting virtue of the imagination."¹⁶ In all such instances he is thinking of the creative activity of the secondary or artistic imagination. Yet in speaking of the babe at the breast he is at pains, as we have seen, to point out that the primary imagination, which every human being possesses, also creates, that all perception is creation; and he elsewhere affirms¹⁷ that fancy is, in its way, creative. Coleridge makes the distinction that the secondary imagination re-creates,¹⁸ but when Wordsworth speaks of the higher type of creation he forgets the lower.¹⁹

He carries this confusion still further when he writes:

Thus far of an endowing or modifying power: but the Imagination also shapes and *creates*; and how? By innumerable processes; and in none does it more delight than in that of consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number.²⁰

This is to imply that the endowing or modifying powers of the imagination are not creative, which is inconsistent with *Prelude* XIV and with his reference to "the creative or abstracting virtue of the imagination"²¹—for in the paragraph immediately preceding the passage we are discussing Wordsworth considers the abstracting as well as the endowing and modifying powers of the imagination. Furthermore, the first illustration he gives of the creative power is one he has already used to exemplify the conferring and abstracting functions. Indeed, the unifying capacity of the imagination would seem to be not separate from the conferring, abstracting, and modifying but to be carried on by means of them. It is through them and them alone that the imagination unifies and creates. Wordsworth was accordingly better advised when, earlier in this same preface, he spoke of all the functions of the imagination as "processes of creation."²²

He gives a number of helpful illustrations of these various functions. Citing from his own "Resolution and Independence" the comparison of the leech-gatherer to a huge stone which

seems a thing endued with sense,
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, which on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun himself,

he remarks:

The stone is endowed with something of the power of life to approximate it to the sea-beast; and the sea-beast stripped of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone; which intermediate image is thus treated for the purpose of bringing the original image, that of the stone, to a nearer resemblance to the figure and condition of the aged Man; who is divested of so much of the indications of life and motion as to bring him to the point where the two objects unite and coalesce in just comparison.²³

Of his poem, *The White Doe of Rylstone*, he says:

It starts from a high point of imagination, and comes round through various wanderings of that faculty to a still higher. . . . Throughout,

objects (the Banner, for instance) derive their influence not from properties inherent in them, not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects. Thus the Poetry, if there be any in the work, proceeds whence it ought to do, from the soul of Man, communicating its creative energies to the images of the external world.²⁴

In the "vision" he saw from Snowdon he recognized a "perfect image" of the way in which the imagination "moulds, exalts, indues, combines, Impregnates, separates, adds, takes away."²⁵ Night had abstracted many things which would have been seen and heard by day and, aided by the moon, had conferred upon the blue chasm and upon "the homeless voice of waters" qualities and a significance which they did not in themselves possess. At the same time the moonlight had modified the whole. A more striking parallel to the abstracting function of the imagination is afforded by the horse which Wordsworth saw on another moonlight evening,

Alone upon a little breast of ground . . .
Insensible and still,—breath, motion gone,
Hairs, colour, all but shape and substance gone.

(de S., 601, lines 36-40)

Here, as in the case of the shepherd "in size a giant, stalking through thick fog, . . . or . . . glorified By the deep radiance of the setting sun,"²⁶ the impressiveness is due to an elimination of details which resembles the abstracting virtue of the imagination.

One other function of the imagination was illustrated in the "vision" from Snowdon, its power to transfer or shift attributes and "to one life impart The functions of another."²⁷ Coleridge speaks of this as "what Bacon calls the *vestigia communia* of the senses, the latency of all in each, and more especially . . . the excitement of vision by sound and the exponents of sound . . . [as in] 'THE ECHOING WALKS BETWEEN.'" ²⁸ "Oftentimes," Wordsworth remarks, Nature

by abrupt and unhabitual influence
Doth make one object . . . impress itself
Upon all others, and pervade them. (xiv. A 77-82)

So it had been on Snowdon: the blue chasm was interpenetrated by the roar of waters that mounted through it, as well as by the moonlight; the moonlight by the sea of mist, the mysterious opening in it, and the sound; the sound by the moonlight, the mist, and the abysmal, gloomy chasm. No one of these things would have been the same without the others. It seemed to Wordsworth as if he *saw* the roar of waters, as if it was almost as much a part of the opening in the mist as the mist itself. "When the Imagination frames a comparison," he wrote elsewhere, ". . . the images invariably modify each other."²⁹ The comparison of the leech-gatherer to a stone illustrates this point for, as he observed,³⁰ the stone and the sea-beast are each given properties of the other and of the leech-gatherer, who in turn is so divested of life and motion as to take on the attributes of the stone and the sea-beast. In speaking of Ossian Wordsworth makes the acute observation that Macpherson's imagery is spurious because everything is "defined, insulated . . . yet nothing distinct," whereas "in nature everything is distinct, yet nothing defined into absolute independent singleness."³¹ That is, nature always works as with an imaginative power for we perceive plants, trees, and stones, not as each is in itself or would appear in a laboratory, but as it is modified by surrounding objects.

This aspect of Wordsworth's treatment of nature has been selected by an eminent philosopher for especial praise: "It would hardly be possible to express more clearly a feeling for nature, as exhibiting entwined prehensive unities, each suffused with modal presences of others" than in the first book of *The Prelude*. Wordsworth "alleges against science its absorption in abstractions. . . . His theme is nature *in solido*, that is to say, he dwells on that mysterious presence of surrounding things, which imposes itself on any separate element that we set up as an individual for its own sake. He always grasps the whole of nature as involved in the tonality of the particular instance."³²

The purpose of the imagination in thus interpenetrating our conception of each thing with that of other things is unity. Such interpenetration, like the other transforming functions of

the imagination, is but a means to the one end. Out of the confused mass of sense impressions connected only by identity or similarity and by occurring at the same time or nearly the same time, the primary imagination forms the unities which we recognize as objects. Its chief function is to unify. Thus the babe at the breast is

eager to combine
In one appearance, all the elements
And parts of the same object, else detach'd
And loth to coalesce. (ii. A 247-50)

So it is with the higher or secondary imagination; its chief function is to unify. When we say that it brings order out of confusion, gives meaning or significance or beauty to events or objects or thoughts, we mean that it arranges sense-data (as transformed by the primary imagination), emotions, and ideas into a pattern, that is into a unity, which satisfies us. The elements that enter into a work of art—sculpture, painting, versification, or characterization—may be conceived by the intellect but they can be fused into a whole, into something that pleases or satisfies or convinces us, only by the imagination.

Matters closely associated in everyday life require little or no fusion from the secondary imagination. Its power is revealed in what Coleridge terms

the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement.³³

To this reconcilment of opposites Wordsworth seems to have referred but once, when, in describing the imagination to his nephew by a series of figures, he remarked: "It is that chemical faculty by which elements of the most different nature and distant origin are blended together into one harmonious and homogeneous whole."³⁴ Yet his failure to emphasize this function of the imagination is not strange since he did not

share Coleridge's fondness for abstractions. He had the idea in mind, however, for he regarded the imagination as the faculty through which the mind perceives the one in the many, the changeless in the flux, the peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation. Furthermore, one of his illustrations of how nature works as with an imaginative power—a rainbow which arched in serene loveliness a valley torn by the tumult and confusion of a storm—⁸⁵ surely exemplifies the reconciliation of opposites. What is surprising is that he did not lay more stress on the unifying power of the imagination. He had much to say of "the unity of all"⁸⁶ but usually not in this connection. To be sure, he spoke of an imaginative person as one who "sees the parts As parts, but with a feeling of the whole," and, according to Hazlitt, he pointed out "the unity of design that pervades [Poussin's landscapes], . . . the imaginative principle that brings all to bear on the same end";⁸⁷ yet he was so little impressed by the unifying function of the imagination that he did not mention it in the last three books of *The Prelude*, which are primarily concerned with this faculty, and in his most extended prose discussion of the imagination he said only: "I will not consider it (more than I have already done by implication) as that power which, in the language of one of my most esteemed Friends, 'draws all things to one; which makes things animate or inanimate, beings with their attributes, subjects with their accessories, take one colour and serve to one effect.'"⁸⁸ There is no indication that Wordsworth ever attached to the unifying power of the imagination the importance which Mr. D. G. James gives to it:

The life of the secondary imagination is one of "struggle to unify"; of steady refusal to allow experience to come in a broken-up way, of absorption of unitary experiences into a patterned whole. . . . the difference between the poet and the ordinary man lies in the strenuousness with which the former refuses to allow any imaginative experience to occur without seeking to embody it in a wider imaginative pattern. . . . when it [the secondary imagination] comes into strenuous life, as it does in the poet, it has its springs in a deeply felt need, the satisfaction of which becomes an increasing necessity to him. This need is for a single imaginative grasp or prehension of life, by the achievement of which life may be mastered and fully lived.⁸⁹

Coleridge, on the other hand, refers to the imagination as the "esemplastic [or unifying] power," and writes: "How excellently the German *Einbildungskraft* expresses this prime and loftiest faculty, the power of co-adunation, the faculty that forms the many into one—*In-eins-bildung!*"⁴⁰ "The poet," he remarks, "... diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination."⁴¹

Such was Coleridge's belief, but we are not bound to accept his opinion and some may ask: "May not the intellect unify effectively without the aid of the imagination? May it not, indeed, perform all the functions which the two friends assign to the more poetic faculty?" To such doubts Coleridge would perhaps have replied that the intellect may deduce a unity but cannot create one, that the unity at which the mind arrives without the help of the imagination is mechanical, non-organic, and lifeless; it is an agglomeration not a fusion. As to the arts, he might have pointed out that the trouble with a great part of the poetry, painting, and sculpture that is produced is that it is chiefly the work of the will and the intellect: in the main imitative rather than creative, sometimes clever or interesting, sometimes (if originality has been sought for) bizarre, and at its best the finished but academic and uninspired product of taste and intelligence. It fails to move us deeply, to delight us, or to feed our spirits; much less does it create a "world to which the deepest and most strenuous life of personality responds, and to which it adapts itself in all its activities."⁴² In many works of art, to be sure, the imagination is present to a slight degree, and in many others it is more or less ineffectual because unaccompanied by strength of intellect, judgment, and taste. Yet it must never be forgotten that these last, indispensable as they are, can do nothing in the arts without imagination.

Wordsworth's firm belief that the reason cannot do the work of the imagination rested primarily on his own experience and his observation of other poets. Yet it was presumably strengthened by his conviction that there can be no real fusion, no significant transformation of sense impressions, and hence no

poetry without what he termed "passion." For "Poetry is passion," "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"; successful composition usually starts from recollected emotion and is carried on with emotion;⁴³ and the material with which the imagination works is planted in its celestial soil by emotion.⁴⁴

The close association of emotion with the imagination in Wordsworth's mind is shown in the fact that much of what he says of passion is equally applicable to the imagination. Here are a few instances:

the array
Of act and circumstance, and visible form,
Is mainly to the pleasure of the mind
What passion makes them; (xiii. 287-90)

"the strong creative power Of human passion"; "Poetry is passion"; "its object is truth . . . carried alive into the heart by passion"; its "appropriate employment . . . is to treat of things not as they *are*, but as they . . . *seem* to exist to the *senses*, and to the *passions*." Wordsworth determined that his own verse should deal with humble man "in truth And sanctity of passion."⁴⁵ Similarly Coleridge spoke of "the blending, *fusing* power of Imagination and Passion," declared that imagination is revealed in the "reconciliation of . . . a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order," and that images are imaginatively used "only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion."⁴⁶

A further illustration of how closely Wordsworth connected imagination with emotion is to be found in his lines:

Paradise, and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields—like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main— . . .
. . . the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.

(*Recluse*, "Prospectus," 47-55)

In place of "holy passion," "imagination" might be substituted without any change in the meaning, since only by the

imagination can the mind be wedded to the universe. The love of an unimaginative person for nature would lead to no miracles. Indeed, such a person could know nothing of the higher, diffusive love of which Wordsworth is here speaking, for such a love is inseparable from imagination:

This spiritual Love acts not nor can exist
Without Imagination. . . .
Imagination having been our theme,
So also hath that intellectual Love,
For they are each in each, and cannot stand
Dividually. (xiv. 188-209)

Here Wordsworth is thinking of the highest manifestations of the faculty which are to be found only in those supremely endowed persons in whom the imagination coexists with nobility of purpose, "amplitude of mind, And Reason in her most exalted mood." "Obviously this is not true of children, however imaginative, or of most adults but only of those who have attained to holy passion, to diffusive love.

Wordsworth does not affirm, however, that the imagination works powerfully only when the feelings are violently stirred. In many of the notable passages in *The Prelude* this was the case—when he fled the place of the gibbet or the pursuing mountain, when he passed the narrow defile in the Alps, or when on Salisbury Plain he saw "our dim ancestral Past in vision clear." Likewise it was true of the mystic experiences, which were closely associated in his mind with the imagination. Yet there is no evidence of strong emotion in the lines on Newton's statue, in the picture of the boy of Winander, of Dampier "sitting all night upon the lap of death," in "Tintern Abbey," "The Solitary Reaper," or the sonnets "To Toussaint L'Ouverture" and "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic." It seems clear, therefore, that Wordsworth did not mean that the composition of imaginative poems or passages is necessarily accompanied by strong emotion but that imaginative activity is possible only in natures capable of deep feeling. Thus it is that "superstitious men [who] are almost always men of slow faculties and deep feelings . . . have a reasonable share of imagination," "and thus children, although their

feelings are not deep, may be imaginative if they lead a passionate life.

Yet not all emotions stimulate the imagination: the turbulent, unpleasant, and merely personal ones in Wordsworth's opinion as a rule do not. He held that if feeling is to affect the imagination it must in most cases be purged by time of its tumult, its immediacy, and its personal quality—must be universalized and recollected in tranquillity. Lander agreed:

So then! I feel not deeply: if I did,
I should have seized the pen, and pierced therewith
The passive world! And thus thou reasonest?
Well hast thou known the lover's, not so well
The poet's heart. While that heart bleeds, the hand
Presseth it close. Grief must run on, and pass
Into the memory's more quiet plain,
Before it can compose itself in song.
He who is agonised, and burns to show
His agony to those who sit around,
Seizes the pen in vain: thought, fancy, power,
Rush back into his bosom: all the strength
Of genius cannot draw them into light
From under mastering Grief; but memory,
The muse's mother, nurses, rears them up,
Informs, and keeps them with her all her days.

It is noteworthy that few passages of imaginative power in Wordsworth's verse treat of personal feelings, however strong. His love for Annette and for his family, the death of his children and of his brother moved him profoundly but not to the composition of great poetry. In this respect although he resembled Coleridge he differed from many poets and artists. These would, however, probably agree with him that disagreeable emotions do not stimulate the imagination, that there must be an element of pleasure in the feeling: "The emotion, of whatever kind, . . . is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described [as in the arts], the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment."⁴⁹ It is partly on this account that nature, which calls forth pleasant and deep but not turbulent emotion, is an ideal subject for imaginative activity.

'Coleridge spoke of the secondary imagination as "co-existing with the conscious will";⁵⁰ that is, he regarded it as a faculty consciously exercised and directed by the mind. But how can this be true of children and young people, in whom the faculty is unusually vigorous? How can it be true of unexpected but powerful manifestations of imagination to be found in adults, such as the vision of our dim ancestral past that came to Wordsworth upon Sarum's plain or the snow fall in Fleet Street that brought him comfort and exaltation? Wordsworth was acutely aware, even more so than most artists, of the unpredictable element in art, of the large part that is beyond the poet's control.

But Nature might not be gainsaid; . . .
Nor is it I who play the part,
But a shy spirit in my heart,
That comes and goes—will sometimes leap
From hiding-places ten years deep.

("Waggoner," iv. 206-12)

He believed that in so far as poetry is highly imaginative it is not under the control of the will or the reason, that they may direct the imagination to a certain field and prepare the ground for it and that those services may be of the greatest value, but that, on the other hand, nothing may come of them; the imagination may sleep or may turn to quite a different field. He observed, for example, that "The Thorn" "ought to have been preceded by an introductory Poem, which I have been prevented from writing by never having felt myself in a mood when it was probable that I should write it well."⁵¹ In describing the contribution of London to his development he wrote:

More lofty themes,
Such as at least do wear a prouder face,
Solicit our regard; but when I think
Of these, I feel the imaginative power
Languish within me.

(vii. 465-9)

Again when speaking of London he declared that his "young imagination" could there

Among new objects serve or give command,
 Even as the heart's occasions might require,
 To forward reason's else too scrupulous march.

(viii. 641-3)

That is, the heart directed it, not the head. Goethe's poetry, he remarked, "was not inevitable enough."⁵² It should have been given to him, as is the case with all the greatest poetry. It seems, therefore, that Coleridge thought of the imagination chiefly as it relates to poetry and thus regarded it as a conscious activity of the mind; Wordsworth, on the other hand, usually conceived of it as the transformation wrought within the mind rather than any expression of such a transformation in a work of art. Even when he considered the imagination in connection with poetry he was so deeply conscious of its independence of the will that he tended to think of its operations as spontaneous "visitings of imaginative power," over which the conscious self had little control.

This difference between the two friends' conceptions of the faculty is illustrated in the importance Wordsworth attached to youth as the period of greatest activity and vigor of the imagination. So far as I know Coleridge said nothing about this, presumably because it was not true in his case; but Wordsworth was thinking of the imagination when he wrote,

Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne
 That hath more power than all the elements, (v. 508-9)

when he saw "in simple childhood something of the base On which [man's] . . . greatness stands," and when he affirmed, "those passages of life in which We have had deepest feeling that the mind Is lord and master . . . in our childhood even Perhaps are most conspicuous."⁵³ His short pieces and the parts of *The Prelude* which deal with his early life indicate that visitings of imaginative power were most frequent at this time. He found "the hiding-places of man's power" in incidents of boyhood and youth⁵⁴ because in them the imagination had been most powerfully exerted. This fact is of prime importance for any understanding of the subject: Wordsworth's conception of the imagination grew out of experiences of his own early years and was grounded on the belief that the faculty

is possessed in all its fullness by youth but is "abated or suppressed" in most adults.⁵⁵

With him years, even a decade or more, often intervened between the event and the composition of the lines that record it, so that he had good reason for asserting that poetry "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." "The emotion," he explains, "is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind."⁵⁶ In any such case the imagination has been employed upon the incident not once but several times: first, when it takes place, or shortly thereafter, again (perhaps) when it is pondered from time to time by the poet, and finally when the poem is composed. Although this point is mentioned by neither Coleridge nor Wordsworth, it is of some importance since it means that incidents which occurred at about the same time may have been transformed at widely different intervals and presumably in different ways; for the imagination is influenced by experience, by reason, and by the affections, and these are not the same in the adult as in the child. Some incidents at the time they happen call forth the imaginative power slightly if at all. Thus it was probably not until the death of his father, ten days later, that the boy Wordsworth gave much thought to the scene at the cross-roads where he watched for the horses. Thus again it was not until he was writing *The Prelude* that "Imagination . . . In all the might of its endowments, came Athwart" him at the thought of his crossing the Alps. Thus it seems to have been with the boy of Winander (Wordsworth himself):

the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind,
With all its solemn imagery.

(v. 384-6)

This episode, he tells us, illustrates "one of the earliest processes of Nature in the development of [the imagination] . . . internal feelings, co-operating with external accidents to plant, for immortality, images of sound and sight, in the celestial soil of the Imagination."⁵⁷ That is, emotion stamped the

scene upon the memory and set the imagination to work upon it, and eventually it was transformed by the "shy spirit" in the poet's heart,

That comes and goes—will sometimes leap
From hiding-places ten years deep;
Or haunts me with familiar face,
Returning, like a ghost unlaid,
Until the debt I owe be paid.

("Waggoner," iv. 210-15)

Apparently images with which the imagination had as yet done little were often thus stored, for Wordsworth spoke of his early years as "a time when images of nature supplied to it [his "youthful mind"] the place of thought, sentiment, and almost of action,"⁶⁸ and he referred to

Distresses and disasters, tragic facts
Of rural history that impressed my mind
With images to which in following years
Far other feelings were attached.

(MS V variant of v. A 472)

The passage just quoted suggests, what would naturally be the case, that the later imaginative transformation of an event may differ widely from the impression made when the event occurs or is first heard of—a matter of some importance when *The Prelude* is used for biographical purposes. Not that the later prehension is often, from the factual point of view, a falsification, although it may be that. A comparison of the three accounts of the Swiss tour,—that in the letter to Dorothy, in *Descriptive Sketches*, and in *Prelude* VI,—leaves no doubt that the later, more imaginative poem gives the truer idea of what the poet originally felt. Such subsequent imaginative pictures of scenes or events, embodying the results of many hours of meditation and implying something of an interpretation, should and usually do present the occasion with greater significance, in a more revealing light, than that in which it was first viewed, because they present it stripped of irrelevancies and with a new emphasis on certain elements that entered into it. They picture it as it came to be seen rather than as it was seen originally, and the probability is that the greater the

time that has elapsed the greater will be the difference between the original impression and the imaginative transformation. From the point of view of pure poetry (and of *The Prelude* as an account of a poet's development) the original impression is important only for what is done with it. Wordsworth pointed out very frankly in some late quatrains the greater significance the imaginative creation may have over the reality that inspired it:

Yes! thou art fair, yet be not moved
To scorn the declaration,
That sometimes I in thee have loved
My fancy's own creation.

Imagination needs must stir;
Dear Maid, this truth believe,
Minds that have nothing to confer
Find little to perceive.

Be pleased that nature made thee fit
To feed my heart's devotion,
By laws to which all Forms submit
In sky, air, earth, and ocean.

Other scenes were transformed, often powerfully transformed, at the time they were beheld. For example, when Wordsworth fled the place of the gibbet, although he was not yet six years old and although what he saw was but an ordinary sight, yet he declared,

I should need
Colours and words that are unknown to man,
To paint the visionary dreariness
Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
Invested moorland waste, and naked pool. (xii. 254-8)

So it undoubtedly was with the mountain that strode after him, the low breathings and silent steps that pursued him after he had robbed a trap, the "waking dream" that came to him upon Salisbury Plain, the times when he drank "the visionary power" standing,

If the night blackened with a coming storm,
Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are
The ghostly language of the ancient earth, (ii. 306-11)

or felt "marvellous things" as he sat

Alone upon some jutting eminence,
At the first gleam of dawn-light, when the Vale,
Yet slumbering, lay in utter solitude. (ii. 342-5)

So it was with the first view of Kilchurn Castle, for the opening lines of his "Address" to the castle "were thrown off," he told Miss Fenwick, "at the moment I first caught sight of the ruin."

These lines may help us to understand how the imagination works and what it does, inasmuch as the poet's sister, who was with him at the time, described the incident in some detail:

. . . at the top came in view of a most impressive scene, a ruined castle on an island almost in the middle of the last compartment of the lake, backed by a mountain cove, down which came a roaring stream. The castle occupied every foot of the island that was visible to us, appearing to rise out of the water; mists rested upon the mountain side, with spots of sunshine between; there was a mild desolation in the low grounds, a solemn grandeur in the mountains, and the castle was wild, yet stately, not dismantled of its turrets, nor the walls broken down, though completely in ruin.⁵⁹

This is, approximately, what Wordsworth saw; what he composed was this:

Child of loud-throated War! the mountain Stream
Roars in thy hearing; but thy hour of rest
Is come, and thou art silent in thy age.

The top of the hill, the island "almost in the middle of the last compartment of the lake, backed by a mountain cove," and completely covered by the castle—all this has been eliminated. The imagination has seized on the essentials and fused them, together with the turbulent history of the place, into a unity. Dorothy's description is entirely visual; her brother's is auditory: "loud-throated . . . Roars . . . silent." Yet we *see* the castle. Here we have an illustration of "the latency of all in each . . . the excitement of vision by sound," of "the power of reducing multitude into unity of effect, and modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling,"⁶⁰

and of the reconciliation of opposites—war and peace, tumult and silence.

How the imagination fuses its materials and "makes one object . . . diffuse itself Among all others and pervade and fill"⁶¹ them is admirably illustrated not only in the view from Snowdon, as *The Prelude* points out, but in "The Solitary Reaper." The impression produced by this piece comes not from the song alone nor from the strange language in which it is sung, for if it had been heard in a crowded concert hall neither the poet nor we should have been particularly moved. Just as the vale profound was overflowing with the sound, so the plaintive numbers are interpenetrated in our consciousness with the thought of the solitary girl and the remote place. The unusual imaginative appeal of the poem is the more noteworthy in view of the way in which it was composed. The immediate impulse did not come from a song Wordsworth heard but from reading the following sentence in Thomas Wilkinson's manuscript *Tour in Scotland*:

Passed a female who was reaping alone: she sung in Erse, as she bended over her sickle; the sweetest human voice I ever heard: her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious, long after they were heard no more.

Here are all the facts, expressed well and with admirable brevity, but nothing more. Wilkinson was not, however, "the onlie begetter"; his words must have awakened in Wordsworth memories of what he had himself seen and heard in a recent tour of Scotland—sights like this which Dr. Johnson described in his *Journey to the Western Islands*:

The corn of this island is but little. I saw the harvest of a small field. The women reaped the corn, and the men bound up the sheaves. The strokes of the sickle were timed by the modulation of the harvest song, in which all their voices were united. They accompany in the Highlands every action, which can be done in equal time, with an appropriated strain, which has, they say, not much meaning; but its effects are regularity and cheerfulness. The ancient proceleusmatick song, by which the rowers of gallies were animated, may be supposed to have been of this kind. There is now an *oar-song* used by the *Hebridians*. The ground of *Raasay* seems fitter for cattle than for corn, and of black cattle I suppose the number is very great.⁶²

These are the facts which Wordsworth must have known, the details which his senses reported. The passage shows little selection and no fusing, no making one object impress itself upon all others and pervade them. Furthermore, the song is related by the intellect to the proceleusmatic chant of the ancient galleys, not by the emotions and the imagination to what Wordsworth termed "infinity"; there is among least things no under-sense of greatest, no embodiment of universal ideas, no relating the reapers or their song to the needs of the human spirit. The primrose by the river's brim remains a yellow primrose and nothing more. This is not to criticize Dr. Johnson, whose purpose was merely to record what he saw, but contrast

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago.

Observe that here is no falsification of reality: the girl remains a simple Highland lass cutting grain with a sickle. So the daisy may suggest thoughts too deep for tears; yet it is still

Thou unassuming Common-place
Of Nature, with that homely face,
And yet with something of a grace
Which love makes for thee!

("With little here," 5-8)

In speaking of another Highland girl, the one he saw at Inversneyde, Wordsworth wrote:

This little bay; a quiet road
That holds in shelter thy Abode—
In truth together do ye seem
Like something fashioned in a dream;
Such Forms as from their covert peep
When earthly cares are laid asleep!

But, O fair Creature! in the light
 Of common day, so heavenly bright, . . .
 Thee, neither know I, nor thy peers;
 And yet my eyes are filled with tears.

("To a Highland Girl," 9-21)

Here we see forms and substances circumfused by the transparent veil of the imagination with light divine so that through the turnings intricate of verse they

Present themselves as objects recognised,
 In flashes, and with glory not their own.⁶³

In "Yew Trees," which Wordsworth thought "among the best [of his poems] for the imaginative power displayed,"⁶⁴ the appeal, so far as the senses are concerned, is entirely visual; but more is meant than meets the eye and the impression produced is not merely of depth of shade, "gloom profound" slowly wrought through centuries of growth, but of grandeur, permanence, mysterious beauty, and awe. Percy, Agincourt, and Poitiers, the intertwined fibres, the grassless floor, the sable roof decked with unrejoicing berries, the ghostly shapes (Fear, Silence, and the rest)—all these unite to form this impression, and whatever would not have contributed to it has been rejected. Thus the poem exemplifies Wordsworth's dictum "that imagination is the faculty by which the poet conceives and produces—that is, images—individual forms in which are embodied universal ideas or abstractions."⁶⁵ In saying this he cannot have meant that the poet commonly has an abstraction in mind and hunts about for an individual form or an incident in which to embody it, but that certain objects or occurrences suggest universal truths or the truths recall the objects, and that the imagination unites the two in a poem. Often the writer while composing the piece must be quite unaware of any abstraction; yet Wordsworth, who well knew how little poetry was within the control of the will, held that he embodied it unconsciously.

Another experience of Wordsworth's although not recorded in verse may help us to understand how the imagination works, how it gives significance to an incident which in itself is nothing. During a visit to London in March, 1808, the poet walked,

on Sunday morning, towards the city. He was much depressed by Coleridge's condition and, as he says,

entirely occupied with my own thoughts, when, looking up, I saw before me the avenue of Fleet Street, silent, empty, and pure white, with a sprinkling of new-fallen snow, not a cart or carriage to obstruct the view, no noise, only a few soundless and dusky foot-passengers here and there . . . beyond, towering above it, was the huge and majestic form of St. Paul's, solemnised by a thin veil of falling snow. I cannot say how much I was affected at this unthought-of sight in such a place, and what a blessing I felt there is in habits of exalted imagination. My sorrow was controlled, and my uneasiness of mind—not quieted and relieved altogether—seemed at once to receive the gift of an anchor of security.⁶⁶

This snow storm in Fleet Street illustrates, quite as well as "moon-light or sun-set diffused over a known and familiar landscape," the combination of "truth of nature" with the novelty arising from "the modifying colors of imagination" which, Coleridge says, was to be exemplified in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth's object in the *Ballads*, he declares, was "to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us."⁶⁷ Naturally, then, Wordsworth connected this scene with the imagination. Indeed, it illustrates more clearly than some of the incidents which he narrated for this purpose

The manner in which oftener Nature works
Herself upon the outward face of things
As if with an imaginative power.⁶⁸

It shows how Nature

moulds . . . endues, abstracts, combines,
Or by abrupt and unhabitual influence
Doth make one object . . . impress itself
Upon all others, and pervade them. (xiv. A 79-82)

The quiet, the emptiness, and the whiteness in one of London's noisiest, most crowded, and muddy streets startled him and stimulated his imagination. The snow simplified the scene by

abstracting most of the details, and moulded and combined those that remained by impressing itself on them and pervading them. It affected every sensation: sound, touch, and temperature as well as sight. The poet's impressions of the foot-passengers, the street, St. Paul's and the other buildings were permeated and solemnized by the thin veil of falling snow; and thus the city, which by nature is an unmanageable sight and one that lays the whole creative powers asleep, presented him a scene so harmonized and unified that even after his return to Dove Cottage it occupied his heart to the exclusion of the beautiful valley and the sheltering mountains of Grasmere.⁶⁹

The most noteworthy thing about this incident is, however, its effect upon the poet. No truth was revealed to him, no addition was made to his stock of learning, but his attitude was changed, his mind was no longer at odds with itself; "the fear that kills; And hope that is unwilling to be fed" were banished; difficulties which were not resolved were accepted and their weight lightened; there was a feeling of "central peace, subsisting at the heart Of endless agitation" and "hence [of] religion, faith, And . . . sovereignty within."⁷⁰ There was, in other words, a kind of catharsis. As in his passing the gloomy strait in the Alps, as in his walk round the lake during the first long vacation, and as in his other mystic or quasi-mystic experiences, comfort seemed to touch his heart and strength and restoration flowed in upon him. In describing the snow in Fleet Street Wordsworth attributed these blessings to "habits of exalted imagination," for they were achieved in the way imagination works: by seeing things in a new way. Peter Bell would have been struck only by the unusualness of the spectacle and possibly by the discomfort of the snow; a more responsive individual would have been delighted with the beauty of the scene; but only the imaginative person would have been caught by its inevitable mastery, exalted, and sustained.

Such was the conception of the imagination held by Wordsworth and Coleridge. It "images—individual forms in which are *embodied universal ideas* or *abstractions*,"⁷¹ but it is not the means by which we derive such ideas and abstractions. It

is not an instrument for the discovery of truth. The terms "imaginative intuition" or "imaginative insight" are misleading since they suggest that it is such an instrument, whereas the faculty by which the mind apprehends truth is reason, discursive or intuitive reason. Reason requires the aid of the imagination as it does of the emotions, of the will, and of sensations, but it must guide and direct them; it alone can discover the meaning of what they offer. Wordsworth expressed the hope that "in general views, my affections have been moved, and my imagination exercised, under and *for* the guidance of reason." ⁷² Aside from three passages, which will be considered immediately, there is, so far as I recall, nothing in the discussions of the faculty by the two poets, in their references to it, in their efforts to distinguish it from fancy, or in the illustrations they give of its operations which affirms or implies that the imagination is a faculty of insight. Wordsworth's most extended consideration of the subject in prose, the Preface to the *Poems* of 1815, includes no mention of truth won by the imagination, and illustrates the workings of the faculty by the metaphorical use of "hangs" and "broods," by the expression "his stature reached the sky," and by the comparison of a man to a stone—imagery which can yield no knowledge save the knowledge of the imagination. He "particularly recommended" to Crabb Robinson "'Yew Trees' and a description of Night" as "among the best" of his poems "for the imaginative power displayed in them." ⁷³ Now each of these is noteworthy as a picture but neither gives any guidance for conduct, any knowledge of life or of abstract truth. So it was, as we have observed, with the snow storm he saw in London, which brought a realization of "what a blessing . . . there is in habits of exalted imagination." ⁷⁴ In *The Excursion* he says that the ability of a blind man to gain a knowledge of the external world is permitted by God,

That to the imagination may be given
A type and shadow of an awful truth.

(*Excursion*, vii. 526-7)

Observe that it is a shadow or image of a truth that is given to the imagination. In the course of some comments on education

he speaks of the imagination as valuable not for acquiring but for using knowledge:

Books of imagination . . . are eminently useful in calling forth intellectual power. We must not only have Knowledge but the means of wielding it, and that is done infinitely more thro' the imaginative faculty assisting both in the collection and application of facts than is generally believed.⁷⁵

The "vision" from Snowdon did not give wisdom, and no hint that the imagination does so is to be found in the various texts of the passage which interprets this "vision." Similarly, the spots of time, which were notable because of the display of imaginative power, yielded spiritual strength but not wisdom. Nor was it the imagination that showed Wordsworth the truth and solved his difficulties after he yielded up moral questions in despair. When, however, he had won his way back to mental health through the sensations and affections, he found once more in man "an object of . . . pure imagination."⁷⁶ That is, the imagination embodied and expressed the triumph won by the aid of the senses and the other faculties. There can be no better evidence that the imagination is not an instrument of knowledge than the possession of it in its fullest vigor by the young, who are obviously not distinguished for wisdom, and by artists and poets, who are often not the wisest of men. "A reasonable share" of it, Wordsworth tells us, is likewise found in "superstitious men . . . of slow faculties."⁷⁷

There are, however, three passages in Wordsworth's poetry which may seem to assert the opposite view. The first of these is a remark made by the Wanderer to encourage the Solitary:

Access for you
Is yet preserved to principles of truth,
Which the imaginative Will upholds
In seats of wisdom, not to be approached
By the inferior Faculty that moulds,
With her minute and speculative pains,
Opinion, ever changing! (*Excursion*, iv. 1126-32)

I understand this to mean that the resoluteness of the higher love, which is spiritual and imaginative, maintains for the wise a firm grasp on principles of truth which the analytical reason

cannot reach. It should be observed that the lines preceding these deal with "tenderness of heart." But, however the lines be interpreted, the expression "the imaginative Will upholds" cannot in fairness be taken to mean "the imagination reveals." The second passage is one which affirms that *The Prelude* tells chiefly of the growth of intellectual and spiritual power "and of imagination teaching truth."⁷⁸ It may or may not be significant that this line does not appear in the final text, but it is certainly worthy of note that the word used is "teaching" and not "revealing." There can be no question as to Wordsworth's belief that the imagination teaches truth, just as the senses do, by furnishing, through its unifying and transforming power and through its embodying abstractions, some of the materials from which reason derives truth. But this is not to say that the imagination or the senses are organs of insight. To deny that the imagination is a source of truth, a means whereby the reason arrives at truth, is to degrade it from the position of a "glorious faculty" to that of master of revels.

Yet there is one passage in which Wordsworth seems definitely to assert that the imagination is a faculty for the apprehension of truth:

Imagination, . . . in truth,
Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood. (xiv. 189-92)

These frequently-quoted lines, which are commonly taken as a summary of Wordsworth's conception of the imagination, cannot, in view of his other utterances, mean what they are usually supposed to mean. It is not likely that they refer to intuition, a quality with which children are to some extent endowed but which is by no means distinctive of imaginative minds or of those notable for amplitude. Furthermore, the faculty symbolized in the view from Snowdon, exemplified in the use of the word "hangs," and analyzed as carrying on its functions "by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses"—this faculty cannot be intuition.

One possible explanation is that Wordsworth is thinking of his mystic experiences, to which the terms power, insight, amplitude, and highest reason are certainly applicable. In describing one of these experiences he speaks of it, although with considerable misgiving, as a manifestation of the imagination and says that he "was lost," that on such occasions "the light of sense Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed The invisible world."⁷⁹ It is hard to believe that Wordsworth would select such an exceptional occasion as typical of the imaginative process, especially as he remarks that only "through sad incompetence of human speech" can the Power that seized him be termed imagination. Again, he "was lost," that is passive, acted upon by something beyond the control of his will, not active, creative, consciously sending abroad transformations and to one life imparting the functions of another.⁸⁰ Finally, the light of sense went out, whereas it is by the light of sense or the recollection of it that the imagination works.

The true explanation, it would seem, should include the mystic experience in a general way but should not be limited to it; and for such an explanation the best place to look should be in the lines leading up to those we are considering. Even a rapid survey of the final book of *The Prelude* makes clear that the first 231 lines were intended to deal with the imagination. This is the subject of the two preceding books and, in the main, of the poem as a whole. Book XIV begins with the ascent of Snowdon and continues with an interpretation of the "vision," seen during the ascent, as a symbol of a mighty mind and of one function of that mind, the imagination. Then comes a description of higher minds who possess that glorious faculty and who are blessed with inner freedom. Wordsworth himself, he tells us, has not enjoyed this genuine liberty to the full, but he has resisted the tendency of use and custom to bow down the soul to sense and to substitute a dead for a living universe. This he attributes to the fear and love which early intercourse with the sublime and beautiful in nature developed within him. He distinguishes three kinds of love and points out that he is here speaking of the higher, diffusive, impersonal love. Then, in what seems to be a sudden change, he turns again to the imagination and writes the lines which we have

been discussing. Finally he speaks once more of the higher love which is inseparable from the imagination.

This appears to be a confused, rambling discussion largely devoted to matters that have no connection with the subject; yet it may be that the seeming digressions and irrelevances contain the key to the meaning of the whole. One thing must be borne in mind: when treating of anything which he feels to be of great value, such as external nature, "religious dignity of mind," or poetry, Wordsworth tends to attribute to it almost every power or good quality.⁸¹ It is likely, therefore, that he is here thinking, as was his wont, only of the highest type of imaginative mind, of those supremely gifted persons in whom imagination is accompanied by power, insight, amplitude, and exalted reason, and in whom these endowments are so closely connected that one can hardly be separated from another. Accordingly he may have intended us to understand that the attributes which he mentions as characteristic of higher minds are theirs because they are endowed with imagination. This is certainly true of the qualities mentioned first: the creative power of transforming sense impressions (91-5), of enabling the reason to build up "greatest things From least suggestions" (101-2) and to achieve freedom from the tyranny of the senses (106). Why then may it not be true of the attributes mentioned in the lines that immediately follow: being made "more apt To hold communion with the invisible world," and being possessed of "the highest bliss . . . the consciousness [of being] . . . habitually infused [by the One] . . . hence religion, faith, And . . . sovereignty within"?⁸² In other words, does not Wordsworth intend to say that it is through the imagination that man enters into communion with the invisible world and attains the consciousness of being permeated by the one spirit—the two chief sources of religion and of inner freedom?

One reason for believing this to be his meaning is that the excellence next mentioned as an attribute of higher minds, apparently by virtue of their imagination, is that of living "in a world of life" (105). This phrase is to be explained by the reference, a little later, to the tyranny of vulgar sense over the soul, a tyranny which substitutes a dead universe for one "which moves with light and life informed, Actual, divine, and true" (157-62). That is, through the imagination the

world is seen to be alive. Wherein? Through being permeated by the one spirit. The imagination is, then, the faculty through which we become conscious of the one life in all things.⁸³ This same conception may be found in another part of *The Prelude*, in some lines which maintain that the city "affectingly set[s] forth . . . the unity of man" and that "when strongly breath'd upon By this sensation "

Of union or communion doth the soul
Rejoice as in her highest joy: for there,
There chiefly, hath she feeling whence she is,
And, passing through all Nature rests with God.

(viii. A 823-35)

These lines are close to xiv. A 103-11: Higher minds are

By sensible impressions . . . made . . . more apt
To hold communion with the invisible world.
Such minds are truly from the Deity,
For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss
That can be known is theirs, the consciousness
Of whom they are habitually infused
Through every image, and through every thought,
And all impressions; hence religion, faith.

"Communion," it will be observed, occurs in each; "highest joy" in one and "highest bliss" in the other; the "feeling whence she is" in one and "the consciousness Of whom they are habitually infused" in the other; "God" in one and "religion, faith" in the other. What is new is that with consciousness of the divine presence is associated a feeling of the unity of man.⁸⁴ This feeling seems to arise from a conviction that all men are pervaded by the one spirit by which the imaginative person feels himself to be infused; and the similarity between the language of this passage and of xiv. A 103-11 (which apparently relates to the imagination) suggests that the imagination is the faculty through which one becomes aware of the spirit pervading and unifying mankind. What makes this the more likely is Wordsworth's belief that it is by means of the imagination that we perceive unity.

A further extension of this conception seems to be implied

in some other lines which speak of London. The "blank confusion" of the city, we are told, although it be

By nature an unmanageable sight,
It is not wholly so to him who looks
In steadiness, who hath among least things
An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole. (vii. 732-6)

To be sure, the imagination is not mentioned here but neither is it in the first 187 lines of xiv, Wordsworth's most important treatment of the subject; furthermore, this passage has so much in common with xiv. A 69-143 that it must deal with the same theme, especially as the power referred to is here termed "of all acquisitions first." What seems to be implied in these lines is that the imagination is the faculty through which the mind conceives of the one in the many, the abiding in the flux, the unity underlying the apparent confusion of phenomena. Wordsworth does not say this; he nowhere explicitly states that the imagination is the instrumentality of our communion with the invisible world, or of our becoming conscious of being habitually infused by the One, of the external world as permeated by the one interior life that lives in all things, and of mankind as unified in the one Spirit who pervades it. Possibly he did not realize that such was really his belief; possibly he was cautious through not being sure (in the absence of Coleridge) of his own ground or through fear of alarming the orthodox.

But unless he meant something like this he was utterly confused in xiv. 105-205, wandering inexplicably from the point and making assertions that are basically inconsistent with what he elsewhere said and implied concerning the imagination,—this too in what he intended to be the culmination of the argument of one of his chief poems. On the other hand, if he held this view of the imagination the passage in xiv becomes not only clear and relevant but illuminating and entirely consistent with everything he has said or implied on the subject in *The Prelude* and elsewhere. No other conception of the imagination does this.

The interpretation here given explains, for example, the difficult lines,

By love, for here
Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes,
All truth and beauty, from pervading love.⁸⁸

That is, the intellectual or spiritual love which reaches out to all mankind and is inseparable from imagination⁸⁸ is the theme—"here Do we begin and end"—of *The Prelude*, the source of spiritual dignity, and the means of our perceiving all truth and beauty. For through imaginative love we commune with the invisible world, become conscious that we are infused by the divine, and feel "the sentiment of Being spread O'er all"—and through such communion, such consciousness, come spiritual grandeur as well as insight into truth and beauty. Finally the perplexing passage,

Imagination . . .
Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood, (xiv. 189-92)

at last becomes clear. For the faculty through which we commune with the invisible world, realize the unity of man, are conscious of external nature as alive and permeated by one spirit, and apprehend the one in the many, the abiding in the flux,—this faculty is indisputably "power . . . insight . . . And Reason in her most exalted mood."

For most persons such an exalted conception of the imagination as this would mean that a child cannot be imaginative in any full sense of the term. Not so Wordsworth. Indeed, much of Wordsworth's glorification of infancy arose from his conviction that the child is richly endowed with imagination in this very sense:

By sensible impressions not enthrall'd,
But quicken'd, rous'd, and made thereby more apt
To hold communion with the invisible world.

(xiv. A 103-5)

It is through his imagination that the child is "haunted for

ever by the eternal mind," and it is due in part to the same faculty that he is the "best Philosopher,"

Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find.
(Immortality Ode, 110-16)

It was one who saw childhood as possessed of imagination in all the might of its endowments who wrote,

Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.
("It is a beauteous evening," 9-14)

To be sure, since he does not have the experience or the needs of the adult and since reason and the other faculties are but imperfectly developed in him, the child cannot make the use of what the imagination offers, cannot learn from it, as the "higher minds" do. Yet the faculty itself, Wordsworth appears to have thought, is as strong and as complete in the early as in the late years.⁸⁷

It is easy to understand why Wordsworth, if he thought of the imagination in this way, associated it with the mystic experience which came to him when he described his crossing the Alps:

Imagination . . . here that Power,
In all the might of its endowments, came
Athwart me; . . . in such visitings
Of awful promise, when the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
The invisible world, doth Greatness make abode. . . .
Our destiny, our nature, and our home
Is with infinitude, and only there. (vi. A 525-39)

Spiritual greatness, the revelation of the invisible world, and the thought of infinitude all suggested the imagination.

Something like the experience just described—a flash which reveals the invisible world, an intimation of infinitude, a sense

of something far more deeply interfused—is to be found at the conclusion of many of the more imaginative passages in Wordsworth's poetry: "Nutting," the hunt for birds' eggs, the borrowed boat, the return from Furness Abbey and from the bowling-green, the evening black with storm spent beneath a rock, the first walk round the lake, the boy of Winander, the spots of time. In one of the most profoundly imaginative of Wordsworth's descriptions, that of the gloomy pass in the Alps, the thought of the invisible world is not alone suggested but definitely asserted: woods, crags, winds, and clouds

Were all like workings of one mind, . . .
 Characters of the great Apocalypse,
 The types and symbols of Eternity,
 Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.

(vi. 636-40)

The connection between the imagination and eternity or infinity, which is implied in these lines and in those quoted just before them, is made explicit in a number of places. Wordsworth speaks, for example, of "imaginative heights, that yield Far-stretching views into eternity";⁸⁸ he asserts that from the progress of the imagination he has drawn

The feeling of life endless, the great thought
 By which we live, Infinity and God, (xiv. A 183-4)

that "Imagination [is given] to incite and to support the eternal" part of our nature,⁸⁹ that the scene he beheld from Snowdon presented

The perfect image of a mighty Mind,
 Of one that feeds upon infinity, (xiv. A 69-70)

and especially of the imaginative power of such a mind, which can transform, shift, and create, "trafficking with immeasurable thoughts,"⁹⁰ that from childhood his imagination had been fed by a road which disappeared over a hill and "was like a guide into eternity."⁹¹ His most explicit reference to the subject is to be found in his letter to Landor of January 21, 1824: "Even in poetry it is the imaginative only, viz., that which . . . turns upon infinity, that powerfully affects me . . . passages

where things are lost in each other, and limits vanish, and aspirations are raised." Some years before this, however, Crabb Robinson wrote in his diary that Wordsworth "represented . . . much as, unknown to him, the German philosophers have done—that by the imagination the mere fact is exhibited as connected with that infinity without which there is no poetry." ⁹² What did he mean by this? What do others mean by saying that the imagination presents all things *sub specie aeternitatis*?

Part of the meaning is made clear in Wordsworth's remark that his imagination was fed by the sight of a road which disappeared over a hill and

Was like a guide into eternity,
At least to things unknown and without bound.

(xiii. A 151-2)

It is also implied in his observation that the imagination does not assert that Satan's dimensions "equalled those of Teneriffe or Atlas;—because these . . . are bounded: The expression is, 'His stature reached the sky!' the illimitable firmament." ⁹³ Similarly he remarks that a child standing by a running stream will ask whence it comes and "'towards what abyss is it in progress? . . ." And the spirit of the answer must have been . . . a receptacle without bounds or dimensions;—nothing less than infinity." ⁹⁴ There is no reference to the imagination here nor in the description of the statue of Newton—

The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone;

(iii. 62-3)

yet much of the imaginative appeal of these memorable lines is due to the thought of the lonely voyage through limitless time and space. There is something of this in the penultimate stanza of "Resolution and Independence," a suggestion of endless weary moors and of the old man wandering forever over them, silent and alone. Likewise in the greeting, "What, you are stepping westward?"—which was "a sound Of something without place or bound"—it was the unexpected intimation of the illimitable that profoundly stirred the poet's imagi-

nation. Blake, too, was thinking of the infinite as the boundless when he referred to the imaginative power to

Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.⁹⁵

Akin to the conception of the infinite as the unlimited is the thought of it as the antithesis of the trivial. To Wordsworth the city was a "perpetual whirl Of trivial objects" which put "the whole creative [that is, imaginative] powers of man asleep" or wasted them "on fickle pleasures. . . And trivial ostentation." In the mountains, on the contrary, where imagination was nourished, "littleness was not; the least of things Seemed infinite."⁹⁶ The vision seen from Snowdon recalled the imagination and the "mind That feeds upon infinity" not alone in the seeming boundlessness but in the sublimity of the prospect. So it was with the sea:

Ocean's o'erpowering murmurs have set free
Thy sense from pressure of life's common din.
("From the Pier's head," 9-10)

In themselves neither mountains nor sea have any power to free us from life's common din; they do this by stimulating the imagination. It is through the imagination that we achieve "sovereignty within," that we have "among least things An under-sense of greatest." Wordsworth was impatient of triviality;⁹⁷ he was keenly aware of "the tendency . . . Of use and custom to bow down the soul,"⁹⁸ of the burden

Of petty duties and degrading cares—
Labour and penury, disease and grief,
Which to one object chain the impoverished mind;⁹⁸

he valued infancy in part because it knew nothing of such burdens, and fear, wonder, and mystery in part because they free us from them. He pointed out that this freedom is won through the imagination, but he never referred to the emancipation from the limitations of ordinary consciousness, from bondage to the trivial and the transitory, as one of the more important debts we owe to this faculty. Indeed, it is doubtful if he associated this service primarily with the imagination or

if it was often in his mind when he connected the imagination with infinity.

He did think of infinity as the abiding and the changeless, a concept which had for him a profound appeal—

created as we are
For joy and rest, albeit to find them only
Lodged in the bosom of eternal things.⁹⁹

Thus he repeatedly spoke of the sea, the stars, mountains and their snow—all of which have strong imaginative appeal—as "everlasting"; he declared, "Suffering is permanent . . . And shares the nature of infinity";¹⁰⁰ and he wrote, "Fancy is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our nature, Imagination to incite and to support the eternal."¹⁰¹ In a passage already quoted which describes a mystic experience he mentioned "imagination . . . visitings Of awful promise . . . flashes that . . . [reveal] The invisible world," and then added:

Our destiny, our nature, and our home
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be. (vi. A 538-42)

Here he seems to say that only the abiding, the transcendent, the complete can satisfy us. He is apparently thinking, not of the Deity, but of the glory and greatness possible to the human spirit. When he asserted that from the progress of the imagination he had drawn "the great thought By which we live, Infinity and God,"¹⁰² he may have meant by "Infinity" the illimitable and the eternal. Such was perhaps his meaning in his remark to De Quincey that the sight of a certain bright star "fell suddenly upon my eye, and penetrated my capacity of apprehension with a pathos and a sense of the Infinite."¹⁰³

Wordsworth uses "infinite" in a loose sense. What he commonly means by it is the vast, the indefinitely extended, the seemingly permanent and boundless. The mountains are not eternal nor the sea illimitable. Furthermore, our minds cannot form a conception of anything that is boundless, or unlimited, or eternal. Accordingly we cannot "feed upon infinity" in the strict sense of the term or have "far-stretching views into

eternity." The imagination cannot reveal the universal and the infinite in the particular, as it is sometimes carelessly said to do; it cannot prove or picture infinitude or yield any prehension of it. What it does is to furnish "types and symbols of Eternity,"¹⁰⁴ to *suggest* the illimitable, the eternal, and the infinite, to give us the sense of

ever-during power;
And central peace, subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation. (Excursion, iv. 1145-7)

As Wordsworth remarked to Crabb Robinson, it "is the faculty by which the poet . . . produces—that is, images—individual forms in which are *embodied universal ideas* or *abstractions*."¹⁰⁵ Since a consciousness of what is loosely termed "infinitude" can come to us only through symbols and suggestions, the imagination is here of great assistance, for it and it alone can give us intimations of the boundless, the abiding, and the one. Such intimations, although they may be dissipated in mere vague expansiveness, may become a very real help, for from them the mind may derive a sense of values, may see things in perspective—the parts in relation to the whole, the present in relation to the past and the future,—may be freed from absorption in details and enabled to take a more comprehensive view of events, of one's part in them, and of life as a whole. The imagination may hold up

before the mind intoxicate
With present objects, and the busy dance
Of things that pass away, a temperate show
Of objects that endure. (xiii. 29-32)

Here we see *how* the imagination may suggest infinity—by filling the mind with images of high objects, of enduring things, of great deeds, great persons and with an intense awareness of great thoughts so that the present or any particular event or idea is seen against these as a background and importunate details no longer engross the attention. Thus the deep radiance of the setting sun behind the shepherd, by eliminating the personal and local from his appearance, universalized and, by associating him with the splendor of sunset,

glorified him. Thus any individual when "descried in distant sky, A solitary object and sublime" may become for the beholder an embodiment of the universal, the permanent, and the significant.¹⁰⁶ The imagination may also give a sense of infinity by investing objects or incidents with mystery, with a suggestion of something not revealed to eye or ear and far hidden from the reach of words:

Yon star upon the mountain-top
Is listening quietly.

Then again, from it may come flashes that reveal the invisible world and through it we may attain to communion with that world.

How the imagination enlarges and universalizes our conception of a simple incident may be seen in "The Solitary Reaper." The factual basis of the poem, the Highland lass singing as she reaps, is quickly passed over for the nightingale among Arabian sands, the cuckoo amid the silent seas, and the "old, unhappy, far-off things, And battles long ago." With the simple girl and the lonely valley are associated all the lure of the strange and the remote, all the pageantry of romance. This is not infinitude but it points the way towards it, since the mind passes from the present, the actual, the relatively familiar and ordinary to the remote in time and place and thence to the still farther removed, the more vague and mysterious, until power of sight is lost in the dim distance. It is noteworthy that the two memorable stanzas in this poem deal not with the girl and her song but with suggestions of the far away and the long ago, which are supplied by the imagination. This recalls Wordsworth's remark that "by the imagination the mere fact is exhibited as connected with that infinity *without which there is no poetry*,"¹⁰⁷ which is only another way of saying that the imagination presents things *sub specie aeternitatis*, that art suggests universals, that poetry "universalises the particulars with which it deals."¹⁰⁸ So when we speak of art as eternal, when we quote "A thing of beauty is a joy forever," we mean not simply that a particular work of art may survive many generations of men, but that art rises out of the transitory, personal, and changing into the universal and abiding. Most of us feel

that to be great a picture or poem, a statue or novel must do this, that unless "the mere fact is . . . connected with . . . infinity . . . there is no poetry." Not that one need paint or carve or describe universals directly, as the Greeks did, but that *Don Quixote*, Degas' ballet dancers, the sculptures of Chartres, Rodin's Burghers of Calais, the pyramids, and the functional architecture of Rockefeller Center speak to us of something universal and abiding which the senses do not perceive.

The close association of the imagination with infinity, with the higher, intellectual love, and the conception of it as the faculty through which man communes with the invisible world, is conscious of the divine presence within him and in every part of the universe—all this implies that the imagination may become the eye of the soul and that the fullest use of it is possible only to spiritual natures. Such a view need not surprise us if we recall that for Wordsworth "to be incapable of a feeling of Poetry in my sense of the word is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God."¹⁰⁹ He found it difficult to conceive of greatness of any kind divorced from moral and spiritual greatness and was loth to believe that so important a faculty could coëxist with a nature otherwise commonplace, much less with one morally depraved.¹¹⁰ He remarked to Aubrey de Vere that many persons who truly loved external nature "had yet no eye to discern her—which he regarded as a sort of 'spiritual discernment.' "¹¹¹ Was not the imagination for him the eye for the "spiritual discernment" of nature? At least he referred to it as "the mightiest lever Known to the moral world," as "that sacred power," "the glorious faculty assigned To elevate the more-than-reasoning Mind"; he spoke of "the celestial soil of the Imagination"; he asserted that the world created by the imagination is "ruled by those fixed laws Whence spiritual dignity originates," and that

the Imagination is conscious of an indestructible dominion;—the Soul may fall away from it, not being able to sustain its grandeur; but, if once felt and acknowledged, by no act of any other faculty of the mind can it be relaxed, impaired, or diminished.—Fancy is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our nature, Imagination to incite and to support the eternal.¹¹²

It will be recalled that in reply to Landor's remark that he was "disgusted with all books that treat of religion" Wordsworth wrote: "I have little relish for any other—even in poetry it is the imaginative only, viz., that which is conversant [with], or turns upon infinity, that powerfully affects me . . . passages where . . . aspirations are raised." ¹¹³

Since Wordsworth associated the imagination with ethics quite as much as with esthetics, with the life of the spirit quite as much as with the beauty of the external world, he naturally looked upon it as a faculty which emphasizes the nobler aspects of the incidents or objects with which it deals. When he spoke of Nature's working upon "the outward face of things, As if with an imaginative power" he added, "I mean so moulds, *exalts*, induces . . ." ¹¹⁴ Indeed, to exhibit a fact or object as connected with infinity—which to Crabbe Robinson was the heart of Wordsworth's conception of the imagination ¹¹⁵—is to exalt it. Furthermore, he said of "Lucy Gray": "The spiritualising of the character, might furnish hints for contrasting the imaginative influences, which I have endeavoured to throw over common life, with Crabbe's matter-of-fact style of handling subjects of the same kind." ¹¹⁶ It was this spiritualising which impressed Coleridge in *Guilt and Sorrow*. He described it as "the original gift of spreading the tone, the *atmosphere*, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre." ¹¹⁷ Clearly he was here speaking of the imagination; later he said explicitly, "the secondary Imagination . . . struggles to idealize and to unify." ¹¹⁸ His friend nowhere made this claim, although he did remark that the London theatre touched his imagination only "when realities of act and mien . . . Rose to ideal grandeur." ¹¹⁹

Although Wordsworth associated the imagination with the higher love, with the invisible world, with spiritual things, yet when he thought of it in relation to his fellowmen and to everyday life he conceived of it not so much as an idealizing agent as one through which the mind perceives the beauty and nobility of the actual. He emphasized its connection with

truth, with reality. His account of the restoration of his imagination, for example, is devoted mainly to telling how he came to realize the dignity and worth of common man. He does not even refer to what is still the popular view of the faculty, which, confusing it with the imaginary, regards it as the power of transcending reality through the invention of unusual or impossible persons, astonishing adventures, incredible places. This is the conception expressed in Shakespeare's famous lines:

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Wordsworth, on the contrary, stressed "plain Imagination and severe"; he wrote:

When the Imagination frames a comparison, if it does not strike on the first presentation, a sense of the truth of the likeness, from the moment that it is perceived, grows—and continues to grow—upon the mind; the resemblance depending less upon outline of form and feature, than upon expression and effect; less upon casual and outstanding, than upon inherent and internal, properties.¹²⁰

He explained to Crabb Robinson that by the imagination "objects are united . . . on a permanent relation which subsists and has its principle in the capacity of the *sensible* produced to represent and stand in the place of the abstract intellectual conception."¹²¹ "The light that never was, on sea or land" was to him an *ignis fatuus* "borrowed from the youthful Poet's dream";¹²² a "work Of false imagination" was one "placed beyond The limits of experience and of truth";¹²³ true imagination, on the contrary, was "but another name for . . . Reason in her most exalted mood."¹²⁴ He hoped that his own "affections . . . [had] been moved, and . . . [his] imagination exercised, under and *for* the guidance of reason."¹²⁵ He felt that

real shepherds such as he had known when a boy presented "far more of an imaginative form Than the gay Corin" of pastoral poetry, and when telling with pride of his "first creative sensibility" he affirmed that it was "for the most, Subservient strictly to external things With which it communed."¹²⁶ Such would naturally be the views of one who insisted "there is no necessity to trick out or to elevate nature" (that is, reality); who maintained: "Poetry sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep,' but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both"; and whose professed purpose was to bring poetry back from her wanderings in Fancy's maze to "the common growth of mother-earth."¹²⁷

Truth, he used to say—that is, truth in its largest sense, as a thing at once real and ideal, a truth including exact and accurate detail, and yet everywhere subordinating mere detail to the spirit of the whole—this, he affirmed, was the soul and essence not only of descriptive poetry, but of all poetry.¹²⁸

Keats, regarding the imagination as the means by which we perceive beauty, remarked, "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not."¹²⁹ Wordsworth, believing that the imagination is the faculty which images or embodies truth, felt that if the imagination is wedded to reality beauty is sure to follow. The difference in approach and emphasis is revealing. So is the difference between Blake and Wordsworth in this matter. Blake wrote, "Natural objects always did & now do weaken, deaden & obliterate Imagination in me."¹³⁰ Wordsworth's imagination was not deadened but stimulated by reality; it started from sensation but passed beyond it. In some of the higher manifestations of the imagination the light of sense goes out, but in a flash which reveals the invisible world.¹³¹ When speaking of his life in London Wordsworth wrote:

Thus here imagination also found
An element that pleas'd her, tried her strength,
Among new objects simplified, arranged,
Impregnated my knowledge, made it live.

(viii. A 796-9)

It was in part because they felt there was little realization of how closely imagination is connected with truth that Wordsworth and Coleridge had so much to say concerning the distinction between it and fancy. Each yields delight but the function of the latter is chiefly to entertain, of the former to give unity, order, and significance to phenomena. Fancy does not fuse or transform the materials it handles and accordingly achieves no reconciliation of opposites. Its work may be compared to a physical change, that of the imagination to a chemical. It is free, capricious, extravagant, playful, whereas the imagination is bound to truth and reality.¹⁸²

The association of the imagination in the minds of Coleridge and Wordsworth not with the unusual and improbable but with the familiar and the real is shown in the surprising absence from their discussions of illustrations drawn from books of travel. The adventures, the strange fauna and flora described in these works appealed strongly to both poets; yet, except in a single passage written for *The Prelude* but soon rejected,¹⁸³ they made no use of this interesting and eminently suitable material in their remarks on the imagination. Like their predecessors, they were fond of illustrating the working of the faculty by quotations drawn from Shakespeare and Milton; but they dwelt upon single words, images, quiet passages, rather than upon fairies and witches, Caliban and Satan, the building of Pandemonium and the journey through Chaos, which have a prominent place in eighteenth-century discussions of the subject. Wordsworth shows at some length how "the full strength of the imagination [may be] involved in the word *hangs*," in the phrase "His coming," in the clause "His stature reached the sky," or in the comparison of a leech-gatherer to a huge stone.¹⁸⁴ He mentions as a distinguishing characteristic of imaginative minds that "they build up greatest things From least suggestions," that they have "among least things An under-sense of greatest."¹⁸⁵ Corresponding to this power of creative perception is that of imaging perceptions, of embodying universal ideas in apparently trivial happenings, the world in a grain of sand. Accordingly we find that on one occasion Wordsworth defined the imagination as "the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple elements."¹⁸⁶ With this faculty

he was richly endowed, so richly that Pater said his "peculiar function" was "to open out the soul of apparently little or familiar things."¹³⁷ Wordsworth had other distinctive functions but he himself stressed the importance of his discovery of this one:

In life's every-day appearances
I seemed about this time to gain clear sight
Of a new world—a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted, and to other eyes
Made visible [in verse]. (xiii. 368-72)

A little earlier, when describing the restoration of his imagination through associating with the humble shepherds and farmers who were his neighbors, he remarked:

Of these, said I, shall be my song; of these . . .
Will I record the praises, making verse
Deal boldly with substantial things. (xiii. 232-5)

"The Imagination," he asserted, ". . . does not require for its exercise the intervention of supernatural agency, but . . . may be called forth as imperiously . . . by incidents within the compass of poetic probability, in the humblest departments of daily life."¹³⁸ The purpose of *Lyrical Ballads* was

to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them . . . in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect.

Another distinguishing feature of the volume was "that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling."¹³⁹ That is, in place of stories, characters, and scenes which in themselves aroused interest, material was chosen which owed its significance solely to what the imagination did with it. "Though I believe God has given me a strong imagination," Wordsworth remarked, "I cannot conceive a figure more impressive than that of an old man like [the leech-gatherer] . . . travelling alone among the mountains and all lonely places."¹⁴⁰ It was such persons—Michael, the old Cumberland beggar,

Alice Fell, the idiot boy—deprived by age, poverty, or misfortune of all romantic charm, whom he chose for his subjects, and, that his purpose might not be overlooked, "the figure [was] presented in the most naked simplicity possible."¹⁴¹ Similarly in dealing with natural objects, it was the common daisy, the small celandine, the green linnet, the cuckoo, the butterfly, the sparrow's nest, and the like of which he most often wrote. "His Muse," in Hazlitt's words,

. . . takes the commonest events and objects, as a test to prove that nature is always interesting from its inherent truth and beauty, without any of the ornaments of dress or pomp of circumstances to set it off. . . . The jewels in the crisped hair, the diadem on the polished brow are thought meretricious, theatrical, vulgar; and nothing contents his fastidious taste beyond a simple garland of flowers. . . . He gathers manna in the wilderness, he strikes the barren rock for the gushing moisture.¹⁴²

Crabb Robinson observed:

Wordsworth, in answer to the common reproach that his sensibility is excited by objects which produce no effect on others, admits the fact and is proud of it. He . . . has a pride in deriving no aid from his subject. It is the mere power which he is conscious of exerting in which he delights.¹⁴³

The unadorned style and restricted subject matter of Wordsworth's poetry were not, however, as Hazlitt and Robinson implied, due solely to pride and stubbornness. In part they came from the poet's consciousness of the limitations of his endowment—in the face of more lofty themes he felt the imaginative power languish within him.¹⁴⁴ In part they are due to the conviction that the jewels in the crisped hair and the diadem on the polished brow could well take care of themselves, whereas the poet's help was needed to reveal the significance, the nobility, and the beauty that lie hidden in the commonplace. Finally they arose in some degree from Wordsworth's desire to eliminate the unessential and the distracting, to leave no wayside bowers in which his readers might linger to the neglect of the goal he had chosen for them. He wished to force them to the labor of re-creating in their imaginations what he had seen and felt. It was *aut Caesar aut nullus*—as

if one should sweep from a window the frilled curtains and pretty vines which distracted attention and partly obscured the view of the great mountain beyond. So in the matter of poetic diction, he aimed to free poetry from substitutes for the imaginative use of language: "gaudiness and inane phraseology" and hackneyed expressions—husks that once held fruit. He condemned severely

an iron age,
When Fact with heartless search explored
Shall be Imagination's Lord,
And sway with absolute controul
The god-like Functions of the Soul,
("To the Utilitarians," 2-6)

but he associated these god-like functions less with dragon's wing or magic ring than with "the common growth of mother-earth." "The sumptuous splendour of colour and perfume which ravished Keats and stimulated Shelley, only impeded his imagination";¹⁴⁵ "the faculty which is the *primum mobile* in Poetry" he commonly thought of as that through which

Verse may build a princely throne
On humble truth.¹⁴⁶

Since the present chapter has been an extended survey of an abstract subject, it may be well to recapitulate. Coleridge probably derived from Kant and passed on to his friend, who made important modifications and contributions of his own, the concept of two kinds of imagination: the primary, which enters into all perceptions and unifies them, and the secondary, which dissolves the work of the primary in order to re-create it—that is, transforms the sense impressions already modified by the primary imagination. This transformation or re-creation is achieved, according to Wordsworth, through abstracting or eliminating some sense impressions, through modifying others, and through permeating the sense impressions derived from any object with those from surrounding objects and the impressions derived through one sense with those obtained through another. How these various methods are used may be seen in the "vision" from Snowdon (*Prelude*, xiv. 1-62),

in the "Address to Kilchurn Castle," in "The Solitary Reaper," in "Yew Trees," and in the account of the snowfall which brought the poet consolation in Fleet Street. A significant feature of each of these pieces and of Wordsworth's numerous comments on the subject is that they represent the imagination as a faculty for seeing or picturing things in a certain way, as an image-making power "by which the poet . . . produces—that is images—individual forms in which are embodied universal ideas." It should work "under and *for* the guidance of reason," which is the faculty for the apprehension of truth. It gives concrete embodiment to the abstractions conceived by the reason and modifies sense impressions in accordance with the conclusions arrived at by the reason. From these embodiments, these modified sense impressions, the reason, if it is strong and sound, may derive other truths; if it is weak or perverted, it will learn nothing or evil. Nowhere does Wordsworth affirm or imply that the imagination itself yields insight into truth. The most important of the apparent exceptions to this statement, the assertion in *Prelude*, xiv. 189-92, that imagination

Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood,

proves to be the key to the unusual conception of the faculty obscurely presented in the preceding lines of this same book and elsewhere in the poem. According to this conception the imagination is inseparable from the higher, diffusive love and is the means whereby we communicate with the invisible world, and whereby we become conscious that we and the external world are habitually permeated by the One, and that mankind is unified in the one Spirit who pervades it.

So exalted, so spiritual a conception of the imagination did not mean for Wordsworth, as it would for most persons, the denial of the faculty to children. To him the imagination was the throne, more powerful than all the elements, on which our simple childhood sits, and much of his glorification of infancy was due to his conviction that it is richly endowed with imagination in this very sense. He does not mention the fact that,

through their lack of experience and the imperfect development of their intellectual powers, children are inevitably deprived of some of the benefits which the faculty confers on adults; nor does he explain how children can enjoy the full power of the imagination when they cannot yet know deep feeling or widely-inclusive love. This last is a real problem in view of Wordsworth's insistence that there can be no imagination without "passion," by which he meant, not personal emotion (which seems rarely to have stirred his imagination) but deep, diffusive, spiritual love. Such love and imagination "are each in each, and cannot stand Dividually."

Although Wordsworth laid great stress on the unity of all and although he said that the imagination unifies, he did not regard it, as Coleridge did, primarily as a unifying faculty. He likewise differed from Coleridge in thinking of it less as a conscious activity of the mind which produces works of art than as a transformation wrought spontaneously within the mind. Sometimes this transformation is made when the event occurs or the scene is beheld; at other times it occurs days, months, or years later and is influenced by conscious or unconscious meditation on the event or scene and on related matters.

Wordsworth associated the imagination with ethics quite as much as with esthetics, with the life of the spirit as much as with poetry. If he did not, like Coleridge, speak of it as an idealizing faculty, this, presumably, was because he wished to stress its close relation to truth and reality, because he thought of it as the agency through which the mind perceives or images the nobility lying in the actual and the commonplace, the significance of the apparently trivial. On this account he and Coleridge dwelt upon the distinction between fancy, the lighter, capricious power, and imagination, which is the servant of truth and is akin to spiritual love. On this account in his discussions of the imagination he emphasized not the strange and remote, fond as he was of travellers' tales, but the power of penetrating the depth of everyday persons and events, of making them live and of forcing us really to see them, of building up greatest things from least suggestions. It was here that his own strength lay and here, despite his admiration for Milton and Shakespeare, that he tended to find the heart of the matter. Yet

there was another aspect of the imagination on which he laid as great or even greater stress,—its relation to infinitude. "By the imagination," he believed, "the mere fact is exhibited as connected with that infinity without which there is no poetry." That is, the imagination so pictures scenes, events, and persons that the reason beholds them not in their petty particularity but finds in them intimations of the universal, the permanent, the significant. It is the faculty by which the poet "images individual forms in which are embodied universal ideas or abstractions." It suggests to the reason the unity underlying diversity; it makes evident the wonderful which is hidden in the commonplace, and the mystery which lies at the heart of all reality. Without such intimations, such embodiments, such suggestions there was for Wordsworth no poetry; but trusting to their aid the poet could deal boldly with *substantial* things.

Imagination is the central, the one essential quality of the poetic mind. What "charity" (love) is to the Christian character it is to the poetic, and though the poet speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not imagination, he is become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. On this account Wordsworth made it the theme of his autobiographic study, the "Growth of a Poet's Mind," and on this account it is the subject to which all our preceding chapters have led up and with which, indirectly, they have dealt. Even matter-of-factness, as we have seen, may aid the imagination by stimulating close observation of the external and the internal worlds and by furnishing solidity, reality, and truth to imaginative creations. "Passion" is far more than an aid, it is an indispensable condition of imaginative activity, for "poetry is passion" and imagination is the heart of poetry. Moreover, one form of passion, impersonal, diffusive love, is impossible without imagination just as imagination is impossible without it.

A principal reason for Wordsworth's unusual emphasis on fear is that fear stimulates the imagination. It is often the spark that sets the imagination to work, the flash that calls attention to a scene or occasion which might otherwise be overlooked and that fastens the scene or occasion on the memory and thus stores up material for the imagination to use. Like

fear, wonder and the sense of the mystery in all things rouse us from the lethargy into which familiar scenes and similar experiences are ever leading us, and may show us the universe as alive, permeated by spirit. They probably sharpen our observation and certainly give zest to life. But they are not so much the parents as the children of the imagination; without it they could not be. So with animism: it is through the imagination that one sees natural forces as beings endowed with consciousness and will, feels that there are spirits in the woods, and that lonely places have souls. In children, who are richly blessed with the faculty as with wonder and the sense of mystery, this way of seeing and feeling is strong.

Animism, fear, the sense of mystery and of wonder—all these enter into that anti-rationalism which is one of the most powerful elements in Wordsworth's thought. But more fundamentally opposed to the analytical reason than any of these is the imagination, which unifies while the reason dissects, which creates while the reason analyzes, which is closely allied to deep feeling, to which reason is opposed. The account in *Prelude* XII of how the imagination is impaired is the story of the triumph of reason; and in *Excursion* IV the analytical methods of science and the "false conclusions of the reasoning power" are contrasted with "principles of truth, Which the imaginative Will upholds,"—or in the words of the Argument, "Wanderer . . . contrasts the dignities of the Imagination with the presumptuous littleness of certain modern Philosophers."

Wordsworth's pre-occupation with nature was due primarily to his love of it and to association with it from childhood. Yet, although this devotion had no ulterior object, it was deepened and nature was treasured the more as he found that his imagination was fed and strengthened through intercourse with woods and mountains, and deadened by cities. He believed that nature, as it gives rise to pleasant and deep but not personal or turbulent emotion, is a perfect subject for imaginative activity, that the wedding of the mind of man to this goodly universe is of supreme importance, and that this union is achieved only by the aid of the imagination. Silence, solitude, and lonely places assisted; indeed, for him this spiritual marriage was rarely possible without them. He valued them not

through misanthropy or love of gloom—from these he was quite free—but because they emancipated him from exigent trivialities, because they nourished mystery, wonder, and fear, because they opened the way for communing with the invisible world and for becoming conscious of the one immanent spirit. That is, they furnished the conditions most favorable to imaginative activity.

To religion as Wordsworth understood it, and he was a profoundly religious man, the imagination is indispensable. Lacking it, man can of course be good but hardly religious. For to Wordsworth the imagination is inseparable from wide-embracing love, without which religion can hardly be, and through the imagination man enters into communion with the invisible world and attains the consciousness that he and the universe are permeated by the one spirit. Wordsworth's religion culminated in his mystic experiences, those supreme instances of communion with the invisible world which were his deepest joy, his abiding source of power. So closely did he associate imagination with these experiences that he explained one of them by saying: "Imagination . . . In all the might of its endowments, came Athwart me." He did not distinguish between the occasions when his feelings and his imagination were deeply moved and those in which he was laid asleep in body and became a living soul. The two have so much in common that it is unnecessary as well as impossible to distinguish sharply between them, but there can be little doubt that Wordsworth's conception of the imagination was deeply affected by these experiences and that his imagination itself was strengthened and colored by them.

It will be seen, therefore, that this study has been concerned with the forces which fed Wordsworth's imagination and those which were fed by it, with those that checked its growth, and with the incidents which called it forth and which it in turn transformed. To be sure, Wordsworth was not always thinking of the imagination even when he wrote poetry. He did not choose his pleasures or the subjects of most of his poems with conscious reference to this faculty; he did not believe there are spirits in the woods because he thought the imagination was involved. Yet the various strands of his thought were so

closely intertwined that the things he stressed were those which ministered to his imagination and the things he reprobated were usually the things which hampered it. Throughout a large part of his account of the growth of a poet's mind he seldom refers to this faculty; yet much of his comment has, ultimately, significant connections with it, and most of the incidents narrated illustrate its transforming power. The ridicule with which his most characteristic poems were received shows how unusual was his conception of the imagination and makes clear why he found it necessary to devote *The Prelude* to expounding this conception and to illustrating its workings.

This has been the study of a single poetic mind, a powerful and a deeply poetic one, but a mind in many respects unique. Almost every poet, it is true, has emphasized the importance for the creative artist of strong feeling; most have felt the need of solitude and silence; many have expressed a distrust of analytical reason; and doubtless all, though they may not have used the term or have analyzed or said much about the concept, have been conscious of the supreme value of the imagination. Yet other poets, greater as well as less, have not attached to external nature the importance Wordsworth gave it, and, although nearly every writer has said something as to what may be called his religion, it has rarely been the religion of Wordsworth. Most have been relatively free from his matter-of-factness and would have condemned it as Coleridge did; many have known nothing of his mystic experiences and have shown little evidence of animism or of fondness for lonely places; no one else has emphasized the ministry of fear. This does not mean, however, that the present study has no general significance. It may mean that all poets are, as poets, largely unique, that there is no such thing as *the* poetic mind. For, like the *genres*, the verse forms, the style, and the language they employ, the beliefs of poets—concerning poetry as well as concerning life—their attitudes, their experiences, and the sources of their inspiration differ from age to age, from country to country, from man to man. Accordingly, it may well be that there is no better way of gaining insight into creative art than to study in detail the mind of a single great poet and to follow from its inception through its various revisions the composition of one of his outstanding works.

NOTES

¹ See M. W. Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Mediaeval Thought* (University of Illinois Studies, XII, nos. 2-3), Urbana, 1927; J. E. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford, 1908, I, pp. x-xii; L. P. Smith, *Four Words* (S. P. E. tract xvii), Oxford, 1924; V. M. Hamm, "Imagination in English Neo-Classical Thought and Literature (c. 1650-1780)," *Harvard Summaries of Theses* for 1932, pp. 251-4; D. F. Bond, "'Distrust' of Imagination in English Neo-classicism," *Philological Quarterly*, xiv (1935), 54-69 and "The Neo-classical Psychology of the Imagination," *ELH*, iv (1937), 245-64; C. D. Thorpe, *The Aesthetic Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1940, chapter III. There is need of a thorough study of the conception of the imagination in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

² *On the Sublime and Beautiful*, Introduction. Burke's use of the term "creative," which would be highly misleading if it were not for the sentences that follow, shows how easily we may read into the comments of our fore-fathers ideas which they did not have.

³ I am here summarizing D. G. James' *Scepticism and Poetry* (1937, pp. 18-24), an admirable work, to which I am not a little indebted in the present chapter. Shawcross holds that "Coleridge's conception of the imagination was not fundamentally affected by his study of Kant" (ed. of *Biographia Literaria*, I, xliii; cf. xli, lviii-lix), but owed more to his reading of Schelling (*ibid.*, lx-lxxii).

⁴ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter IV (ed. Shawcross, I, 59-64).

⁵ *Oxf. W.*, p. 957. Near the end of the fourth chapter of the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge refers with considerable deference to this criticism and explains the disagreement as due merely to Wordsworth's considering the matter with reference to poetry alone whereas his own object was "to investigate the seminal principle." But see below, footnote 19.

⁶ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter IV (ed. Shawcross, I, 58-60, 64).

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 64. For a slight disagreement between the two friends on the subject of the imagination, see footnote 19 below.

⁸ Letter to Henry Reed of September 27, 1845. In a letter to Beaumont of June 3, 1805, he said that Southey's *Madoc* "fails in the highest gifts of the poet's mind, imagination in the true sense of the word, and knowledge of human nature and the human heart"; and on May 21, 1807, he wrote Lady Beaumont, "the voice which is the voice of my Poetry without Imagination cannot be heard."

⁹ Crabb Robinson's Diary of January 6, 1842.

¹⁰ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XIII (ed. Shawcross, I, 202).

¹¹ *Memoirs*, II, 477 (Grosart, III, 465); *Excursion*, iv, 707-8.

¹² Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, pp. 955, 957).

¹³ "Essay, supplementary to the Preface" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 944); cf. *Memoirs*, II, 477 (Grosart, III, 464, last sentence).

¹⁴ *A Defence of Poetry, Works*, ed. Forman, VII, 140; cf. "On Life," *ibid.*, VI, 258; letter to Peacock of August 16, 1818. Shelley quotes the expression from Tasso but L. P. Smith says that he cannot find the remark in Tasso's works (*Four Words*, S. P. E. tract xvii, Oxford, 1924, p. 20 n.). It is interesting to observe that even when Shelley ridicules Wordsworth he pays tribute to his creative powers:

Yet his was individual mind,
And new created all he saw
In a new manner, and refined
Those new creations, and combined
Them, by a master-spirit's law.

(*Peter Bell the Third*, 303-7)

¹⁵ "Essay, supplementary to the Preface" (*Oxf. W.*, pp. 951-2), cf. Preface of 1815 (*ibid.*, 954, quoted below in footnote 19); letter to Lady Beaumont of May 21, 1807.

¹⁶ *The Recluse*, "Prospectus," 69-71; "Essay, supplementary to the Preface" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 952).

¹⁷ Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, pp. 955, 958) and perhaps xiv. A 291-306.

¹⁸ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XIII, quoted above, p. 208.

¹⁹ He does this in the passages quoted above from xiv. A 93-6, in the "Essay, supplementary to the Preface," as well as at the beginning of the Preface of 1815, when he remarks that the merely accurate observation of nature "supposes all the higher qualities of the mind to be passive, and in a state of subjection to external objects." To Mr. C. D. Thorpe ("The Imagination: Coleridge versus Wordsworth," *Philological Quarterly*, XVIII, 1-18) this oversight means "Wordsworth's failure to see" "that all materials are changed . . . in the original act of perception" (pp. 14, 13). But Wordsworth had explained this in ii. 232-65. The conclusion of the twelfth chapter of the *Biographia Literaria* leads Mr. Thorpe to believe that Coleridge discovered a "deep fallacy" in his friend's psychology as it related to the imagination; yet since Wordsworth seems to me to make perfectly clear, as he proceeds, that he does *not* mean, as Coleridge suggests, "the same as, and no more than, I [Coleridge] meant by the aggregative and associative" power (*Biographia Literaria*, ed. Shawcross, I, 194), the explanation may be that Coleridge was somewhat piqued by his friend's obscurely-expressed criticism, which seemed to him misleading and which (if he and Wordsworth were in substantial agreement) magnified unduly a small point.

²⁰ Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 956).

²¹ Quoted p. 209 above.

²² *Oxf. W.*, p. 955.

²³ Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 956). The poetry is cited as it is given in the Preface, not as it appears in the final text.

²⁴ Letter to Wrangham of January, 1816.

²⁵ xiv. A 69 and lines 15-16 of W variant of A 66-89.

²⁶ viii. 266-70.

²⁷ W variant of xiv. A 93 ff.

²⁸ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XXII (ed. Shawcross, II, 103).

²⁹ Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 957). In his letter to Landor of January 21, 1824, he defines the imagination as the faculty whereby "things are lost in each other, and limits vanish."

³⁰ The passage is quoted on p. 210 above.

³¹ "Essay, supplementary to the Preface" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 950).

³² A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, New York, 1925, pp. 116-17.

³³ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XIV, penultimate paragraph. With "the sense of novelty . . . familiar objects" compare Coleridge's statement of Wordsworth's purpose in his part of the *Lyrical Ballads*, "to give the charm of novelty to things of every day" (*ibid.*, second paragraph).

³⁴ *Memoirs*, II, 477 (Grosart, III, 465).

⁸⁸ De S., 601, lines 7-30.

⁸⁹ See ii. 221 n.

⁹⁰ vii. 735-6; Hazlitt's "Mr. Wordsworth," *Spirit of the Age, Works*, ed. Waller and Glover, iv, 277. The unifying power of the primary imagination is stressed in ii. A 247-50, quoted on p. 207 above. Wordsworth wrote Lady Beaumont on May 21, 1807, "the mind can have no rest among a multitude of objects, of which it either cannot make one whole, or from which it cannot single out one individual, whereupon may be concentrated the attention divided among or distracted by a multitude" (cf. xiv. A 81-2); yet he said nothing in this letter of the imagination as the unifying power.

⁹¹ Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 957). The quotation is from Lamb's essay, "On the Genius and Character of Hogarth." In the preceding paragraph Wordsworth mentions, as two of the "innumerable processes" by which the imagination creates, "consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving . . . unity into number." When he asserts, "the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society" (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, *Oxf. W.*, pp. 938-9), he refers not to what takes place in the poet's mind but to his producing something which delights all men.

⁹² *Scepticism and Poetry*, 1937, pp. 46-7.

⁹³ *Biographia Literaria*, title of chapter XIII; *Anima Poetae*, 1895, p. 236.

⁹⁴ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XIV, penultimate paragraph; cf. *ibid.*, chapter XV, fourth paragraph; *ibid.*, chapter XXII (ed. Shawcross, II, 123); and *Table Talk*, January 1, 1834 ("The truth is, he [Landon] does not possess imagination in its highest form,—that of stamping *il più nell' uno*"), and June 23, 1834.

⁹⁵ D. G. James, *Scepticism and Poetry*, 1937, p. 49.

⁹⁶ Note to "The Thorn" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 935); Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*ibid.*, 940).

⁹⁷ Preface of 1815 (de S., 531).

⁹⁸ *Excursion*, i. 480-1; note to "The Thorn" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 899); Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*ibid.*, 938); "Essay, supplementary to the Preface," (*ibid.*, 944); xiii. 235-6. See also viii. 639-43, quoted in part on pp. 219-20 above.

⁹⁹ *Biographia Literaria*, chapters XXII, XIV, XV (ed. Shawcross, II, 123, 12, 16).

¹⁰⁰ xiv. 191-2; see p. 234 above. "Tenderness of heart" is closely associated with "the imaginative Will" in *Excursion*, iv. 1117-32.

¹⁰¹ Note to "The Thorn" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 899).

¹⁰² Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, p. 940). The passage follows immediately after the one quoted on p. 221 above.

¹⁰³ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XIII (ed. Shawcross, I, 202).

¹⁰⁴ Note to "The Thorn" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 899).

¹⁰⁵ Matthew Arnold, who heard Wordsworth say this, quotes it in his essay on the poet. Arnold adds: "The remark is striking and true; no line in Goethe, as Goethe said himself, but its maker knew well how it came there."

¹⁰⁶ xii. 273-5, A 270-7.

¹⁰⁷ xii. 277-9.

¹⁰⁸ ii. 260-3.

¹⁰⁹ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, p. 940).

¹¹⁰ Preface of 1815 (de S., 531; not in *Oxf. W.*). In place of "images" Knight (*Prose Works*, II, 215) has "conjoined impressions," which is not the reading of the 1815 or 1827 Preface.

¹¹¹ Preface of 1815 (*Prose Works*, ed. Knight, II, 207; not in Grosart or *Oxf. W.* because omitted in 1845).

¹¹² Dorothy's *Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland* for August 31, 1803. The extract from the *Recollections* which Wordsworth prefixed to the poem in

1827 is considerably changed from the text quoted above from Knight's edition of Dorothy's *Journals* (II, 33). Further light on the working of the imagination may be gained by comparing "Resolution and Independence" with Dorothy's *Journal* for October 3, 1800.

⁶⁰ *Biographia Literaria*, chapters XXII, XV (ed. Shawcross, II, 103, 14).

⁶¹ A^a variant of xiv. A 79-83.

⁶² Account of Raasay in *A Journey to the Western Islands*. The similarity of this scene to that described in "The Solitary Reaper" was pointed out by Oswald Doughty in his *English Lyric in the Age of Reason* (1922), pp. 18-19.

⁶³ v. 601-5 with some omissions and additions.

⁶⁴ Crabb Robinson's *Diary* for May 9, 1815.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, September 11, 1816. See also Wordsworth's comments given in the *Diary* for June 3, 1812 (quoted on p. 247 above), and for May 31, 1812: "The poet first conceives the essential nature of his object and strips it of all its casualties and accidental individual dress, and in this he is a philosopher; but to exhibit his abstraction nakedly would be the work of a mere philosopher; therefore he reclothes his *idea* in an individual dress which expresses the essential quality, and has also the spirit and life of a sensual object, and this transmutes the philosophic into a poetic exhibition."

⁶⁶ Letter to Beaumont of April 8, 1808. As the letter is known only from Knight's printing of it, there can be no certainty as to the exact wording.

⁶⁷ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XIV (ed. Shawcross, II, 5-6).

⁶⁸ De S., 600 n. The incidents referred to are those, included in MS W of *The Prelude* but later rejected, which will be found in de S., 601-5.

⁶⁹ vii. 679-81, 721-36; letter to Beaumont of April 8, 1808.

⁷⁰ "Resolution and Independence," 113-14; *Excursion*, iv. 1146-7; *Prelude*, xiv. A 111-14.

⁷¹ Crabb Robinson's *Diary* for September 11, 1816.

⁷² Conclusion of the Postscript to the *Poems* of 1835 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 966). In the "Character of the Happy Warrior," 15-28, he speaks of reason as "our human nature's highest dower." Mr. C. S. Lewis writes, "It must not be supposed that I am in any sense putting forward the imagination as the organ of truth. . . . For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning" (*Rehabilitations*, Oxford, 1939, p. 157).

⁷³ *Diary* for May 9, 1815.

⁷⁴ Letter to Beaumont of April 8, 1808.

⁷⁵ Letter to Seymour Tremenheere of December 16, 1845.

⁷⁶ xiii. 48-50.

⁷⁷ Note to "The Thorn" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 899). Coleridge in characterizing the human faculties spoke of the imagination only as the "shaping and modifying power" (*Biographia Literaria*, chapter XII, ed. Shawcross, I, 193).

⁷⁸ xii. A 42-5.

⁷⁹ vi. 592-602.

⁸⁰ xiv. A 93-4 and W variant of these lines.

⁸¹ As to nature, see pp. 106-8 above; as to poets, see Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, p. 937), and the very dubious remark, "The happiest of all men, viz. poets" (*Memoirs*, I, 173, *Oxf. W.*, p. 899); as to "that religious dignity of mind, That is the very faculty of truth," see iv. A 297-8 n.

⁸² xiv. A 104-14. Note the power attributed to "imaginative Faith" in "Desire we past illusions," 10. Wordsworth wrote J. K. Miller, December 17, 1831: "It is the habit of my mind inseparably to connect loftiness of imagination with that humility of mind which is best taught in Scripture."

⁸² ii. A 429-30. I understand xiv. 157-66 to mean that the imagination is stimulated by the fear and love which the sublime and beautiful forms of external nature arouse in us, and being thus stimulated it presents the universe to the mind as living, as permeated by spirit.

⁸³ The last line (viii. A 835) may mean that one passes from a sense of the one life in all persons and things to the Divine Himself.

⁸⁴ xiv. A 149-51; these lines were greatly changed in the final text. It should be observed that, according to the interpretation given above, xiv. 136-59 is not a digression since Wordsworth is here speaking not of moral lapse but of the time when, through devotion to analytical reason, his imagination was "impaired." "Visitations" (141) recalls "visitings of imaginative power" (xii. 203).

⁸⁵ xiv. 188-9, 206-9; note "diffusive" (A 163) and see pp. 216-17 above.

⁸⁶ Wordsworth never raised this question and perhaps never considered it, or at least, never faced it squarely; accordingly, this opinion must be understood as what seems to me the logical deduction from his various utterances. The association of the imagination with higher minds in xiv. 89-90 does not mean that such minds have a more exalted imagination, different in kind from that of other minds, but that they are more richly endowed with imagination and make the fullest and the noblest use of their imaginative powers.

⁸⁷ *Excursion*, iv. 1188-9.

⁸⁸ Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 958).

⁸⁹ W variant of xiv. A 93 ff.

⁹⁰ xiii. A 145-51; "fed" is in MS D.

⁹¹ Diary for September 11, 1816. Mr. W. O. Raymond reminds me that Browning wrote Ruskin c. 1858, "All poetry is the problem of putting the infinite into the finite."

⁹² Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 957).

⁹³ "Upon Epitaphs" (Grosart, II, 29); cf. "the unvoyageable sky In faint reflection of infinitude Stretched overhead" (*Excursion*, v. 342-4).

⁹⁴ "Auguries of Innocence," 1-4. The question as to whether Wordsworth's emphasis upon the boundless is merely emotional expansiveness is considered in pp. 4-7 above.

⁹⁵ vii. 725-6, 681; *Excursion*, iv. 819-22, i. 226-31.

⁹⁶ iv. 278-306 n.

⁹⁷ xiv. 157-8; de S., 606. Both passages are concerned with the imagination.

⁹⁸ "To the Clouds," 92-4. See i. 409 n. I have not attempted to distinguish the everlasting from the changeless since both meanings are relevant to the present discussion and since Wordsworth, like most other persons, commonly fuses the two conceptions. By "everlasting," "permanent," "eternal," he may mean either idea or both.

⁹⁹ *Borderers*, 1543-4.

¹⁰⁰ Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 958).

¹⁰¹ xiv. A 182-4.

¹⁰² De Quincey, "Wordsworth," *Literary Reminiscences*, Boston, 1851, I, 309; not in Masson. In the sonnet, "Tranquillity! the sovereign aim," "the Infinite" seems to mean God.

¹⁰³ vi. 639.

¹⁰⁴ Diary for September 11, 1816. Irving Babbitt, the severest critic of romantic expansiveness, wrote: "Man may indeed be defined as the insatiable animal; and the more imaginative he is the more insatiable he is likely to become, for it is the imagination that gives him access to the infinite in every sense of the word" (*Romanticism and Romanticism*, Boston, 1919, p. 251).

¹⁰⁸ viii. 262-76.

¹⁰⁷ Crabb Robinson's Diary for September 11, 1816, my italics.

¹⁰⁶ W. R. Inge, *Studies of English Mystics*, 1907, p. 174.

¹⁰⁵ Letter to Lady Beaumont of May 21, 1807.

¹¹⁰ See, however, the part of the note to "The Thorn" which is quoted on p. 217 above, and the reference in xi. A 848 to "false imagination." Since Wordsworth saw in Byron "a monster . . . a Man of Genius whose heart is perverted" and in Landor "a madman, a bad-man, yet a man of genius, as many a madman is" (letters to Miss Kinnaird of January 30, 1833, and to W. R. Hamilton of April, 1843), he must have recognized that the imagination, like other good things, may be put to evil uses or may become perverted; but he undoubtedly regarded such cases as exceptional and commonly overlooked them when speaking of the faculty. He did not, of course, believe that a good man is necessarily an imaginative one (see third paragraph of his letter to Lady Beaumont of May 21, 1807).

¹¹¹ "Recollections of Wordsworth" (Grosart, III, 488).

¹¹² *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, I, xxxiv, 9-10; "Weak is the will of Man," 6-9; Preface of 1815 (de S., 531, not in *Oxf. W.*); xiii. 372-3; Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 958). In the "Essay, supplementary to the Preface" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 944) he speaks again of "the grandeur of the imagination."

¹¹³ Letter to Landor of January 21, 1824.

¹¹⁴ Lines 12-15 of W variant of xiv. A 66-89, my italics.

¹¹⁵ Diary for September 11, 1816.

¹¹⁶ Fenwick note to "Lucy Gray."

¹¹⁷ *Biographia Literaria*, chapter IV (ed. Shawcross, I, 59).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, chapter XIII (I, 202). Henry James said of Daisy Miller: "My supposedly typical little figure was of course pure poetry, and had never been anything else; since this is what helpful imagination, in however slight a dose, ever directly makes for" (James, *The Art of the Novel*, New York, 1934, p. 270).

¹¹⁹ vii. 477-80. Cf. xiv. 76, "In sense conducting to ideal form" (said of the imagination).

¹²⁰ viii. 366; Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 957).

¹²¹ Diary for June 3, 1812.

¹²² "Elegiac Stanzas . . . Peele Castle," 16, text of 1820 and 1827. Wordsworth later returned to the original reading, which although misleading is much more impressive than that of 1820-7. His criticism was directed at the reason, not at the imagination, of the youthful poet.

¹²³ xi. A 847-9.

¹²⁴ xiv. 189-92.

¹²⁵ Postscript to the *Poems* of 1835 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 966).

¹²⁶ viii. 282-7; ii. 360-8.

¹²⁷ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, pp. 938, 937); *Peter Bell*, 133. Cf. "Essay, supplementary to the Preface" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 948), Pope was seduced "into a belief that Nature was not to be trusted"; and "A volant Tribe of Bards," 5-8: "To the solid ground Of nature trusts the Mind that builds for aye . . . there only, she can lay Secure foundations." In each of these instances "nature" means truth, reality.

¹²⁸ Aubrey de Vere, "Recollections of Wordsworth" (Grosart, III, 488).

¹²⁹ Letter to Bailey of November 22, 1817.

¹³⁰ Annotations in Wordsworth's *Poems* (*Poetry and Prose*, ed. G. Keynes, 1927, p. 1024).

¹³¹ vi. 592-602.

¹³² See below, viii. 373 n. The distinction is easier to understand than to apply to specific poems.

¹³³ De S., 602-5.

¹³⁴ Preface of 1815 (*Oxf. W.*, pp. 955-7).

¹³⁵ xiv. 101-2; vii. 734-5.

¹³⁶ Note to "The Thorn" (*Oxf. W.*, p. 899). Coleridge, so far as I know, does not mention this point.

¹³⁷ "Wordsworth" in *Appreciations*. Cf. Legouis trs., 446: "The peculiar province of Wordsworth is that of the *common*. Wherever selection was possible he held it his duty to borrow nothing from those elements of the world which are marvellous or unusual." He was impressed by the story that Reynolds took "from the print of a half-penny ballad in the Street an effect in one of his Pictures which pleased him more than anything he had produced" (letter to Crabb Robinson of April 26, 1829); he included in the selection of poems he made for Lady Mary Lother and later prefixed to his "In youth from rock to rock I went" some lines of Wither's which assert that by means of such simple things as a daisy

Or a shady bush or tree
She [his muse] could more infuse in me,
Than all nature's beauties can
In some other wiser [man].

(*Poems and Extracts chosen by Wordsworth*, 1905, p. 35)

¹³⁸ Dedication of *Peter Bell* (*Oxf. W.*, p. 236); cf. lines 133-45 of the poem, quoted on p. 402 above.

¹³⁹ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Oxf. W.*, p. 935).

¹⁴⁰ *Memoirs*, I, 173 (*Oxf. W.*, p. 899).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² "Mr. Wordsworth," in *The Spirit of the Age, Works*, ed. Waller and Glover, IV, 271-2.

¹⁴³ Diary for May 9, 1815. Again in the *Reminiscences*, August 18, 1820 (*H. C. Robinson on Books and their Writers*, ed. Morley, 1938, I, 249), he wrote, "Wordsworth, I knew, was not fond of drawing the subjects of his poems from occurrences in themselves interesting."

¹⁴⁴ vii. 465-9; cf. ix. A 633-43 ("Vaudracour and Julia," 87-91), *Peter Bell*, 1-155.

¹⁴⁵ C. H. Herford, *The Age of Wordsworth*, 1905, p. 159.

¹⁴⁶ Letter to Professor Reed of September 27, 1845; "At the Grave of Burns," 35-6.

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